

Extrō

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Editorial

Every two months EXTRO will present interesting and informative interviews, reviews and articles. But we are primarily a fiction magazine and in each bi-monthly issue we will be bringing you at least five short stories, the work of both established authors and talented newcomers.

You'll find most science/speculative fiction themes represented in these pages in coming issues, enough to suit almost all tastes. We shall be exploring all that territory between the inner and the outer spaces.

And, if you're dissatisfied, write and tell us. But don't only write if you're unhappy about the magazine: when we print stories you especially like, tell us; when you want to read more of a particular author, tell us.

It's been more than ten years since a British magazine devoted to Science Fiction appeared regularly on the book shelves, so there's a gap that needs filling. EXTRO intends to fill that gap.

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ROBERT SILVERBERG LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE

Silverberg said that he would never write again. Having retired in 1974 in his early forties after completing over 70 novels and 60 non-fiction books, he was reputed to have made a fortune from writing. In 1977, under pressure from Harlan Ellison, he tried to write a short story but couldn't get past the second sentence. But in April 1978, in his fabled garden one sunny afternoon, a brief idea for a book occurred to him. He scribbled the idea on the back of an envelope and got in touch with his American publishers, Harper & Row. After a frenetic publishers' auction, he had committed himself to write a special epic quite unlike anything he had produced before. Harpers gave him a six-figure advance. Forced amidst a great deal of publicity to complete the new book, he found that he couldn't even begin it. Then, on the afternoon of 31 October 1978, whilst once more he was pacing the fuchsia- and cacti-filled garden that had become his overwhelming passion, he found himself writing, almost automatically, on another scrap of paper, the first sentence of a novel, almost like Coleridge waking to the first lines of Kubla Khan.

And then, after walking all day through a golden haze of humid warmth that gathered about him like a fine white fleece, Valentine came to a great ridge of outcropping white stone overlooking the city of Pidruid. It was the provincial capital, sprawling and splendid, the biggest city he had come upon since — since? — the biggest in a long while of wandering, at any rate. There he halted, finding a seat at the edge of the soft, crumbling white ridge digging his booted feet into the flaking ragged stone, and sat there staring down at Pidruid, blinking as though he were newly out of sleep. . . .

Lord Valentine's Castle is now published as a Pan paperback, a vast epic fantasy saga of usurped power and reclaimed fate. It is

'Spectacularly readable . . . it bears comparison with Frank Herbert's *Dune*' (*The Times*); 'A magnificent Behemoth of a fantasy . . . with all the narrative skills and imaginative brilliance that have made his recent science fiction so exceptional' (*Tribune*). 'Silverberg's invention is prodigious . . . a near-encyclopaedia of unnatural wonders and weird ecosystems. Silverberg, like a competent juggler, maintains his rhythm and suspense to the end.' (*Times Literary Supplement*).

Published 9 October 1981



Pan Books



The Invisible Men

fiction by

Christopher Priest

While I was waiting for Charles Greystone to arrive, my attention was caught by the sight of a man repainting the hull of a sailing-yacht that had been laid on its side across the mud-flats. He was about fifty yards from where I stood, and was taking no notice of me. He crouched with his back to me on the rounded wooden hull, carefully applying a coat of sea-blue paint.

What attracted my particular interest was the fact that whenever he leaned across to dip his brush in the pot his shirt was stretched tight across his back, revealing a bulge beneath the pit of his left arm.

Greystone had warned me he might be delayed, although there was no doubt but that he would keep the appointment. This meeting was of equal importance to us both, and we had had to delay prior engagements in order to make the time for this. I presumed that he was on his way after having arranged for a car-breakdown, or some similar excuse.

continued over

The Invisible Men—Priest

The mud-flats at Blakeney — this village where we had agreed to meet — had once been a bird-sanctuary. Here, on the Norfolk coast some miles to the east of the Wash, the sea was shallow and over the centuries silt from the rivers Ouse and Nene had built up over along the coastline to form a maze of narrow waterways and lagoons running between banks of grass-topped mud. I had been told that not many years before, this had been a regular sanctuary for migrating geese . . . but now there were few birds of any kind to be seen. There were dozens of drilling-rigs in this part of the North Sea — although they were invisible from Blakeney quay — and the spillage from these had poisoned the flats. The Department of the Environment had instigated a cleaning-up programme, but as yet there was no outward sign of any large-scale return of wildlife.

I paced to and fro on the quay, feeling conspicuous in the anorak and sailing-cap I had borrowed from my son. I felt sure that someone would recognise me, even though Greystone had assured me that his staff would take care of security.

The man painting the yacht stood up, and stretched, he clambered down from the hull, and walked round to the other side carrying his pot of paint. He bent down so that he was partly out of view, reaching through the doorway of the cabin. It had obviously been some time since the boat had been paid any attention; the metal rail around the edge of the upper deck had rusted, and several of the cabin windows were broken. Some of the rigging was still in place, and I noticed that a length of bright new wire had been stapled to the mast. This, and the still-wet paint, was the only sign that anyone had been near the yacht in five years.

Further away, where a dirt path led out across the mud-flats, more yachts were parked. These too were neglected, their rigging clacking in the stiff breeze from the sea.

In a few moments the man came round the hull again, climbed up to his former position, and continued with his painting. Although I was the only person standing on the quay, not once did he even glance in my direction.

I looked at my watch: we were ten minutes beyond the appointed time. No less than Greystone, my available time was short. I was due to address a political meeting at Steaford in the evening and would have to return to the scientific research station at near-by Walsingham in under an hour to take the helicopter.

In spite of time being short, and of the present circumstances that had made necessary this meeting, my mood was light. What had happened to me in the last ten days was possibly — for the man who occupied the highest political office in Britain — the worst imaginable disaster, and yet my mind was more untroubled than at any time I could ever remember. Perhaps it was because of the knowledge that this, without doubt, was the end of my career; it was possibly other factors too. The masquerade of casual clothes that Greystone had insisted upon, the sequence of contrived accidents stage-managed to give us both about an hour of stolen time, the pro-

spect of what would happen to me after tomorrow: all these were contributing to my present feeling that all about me was unreal.

The village, too seemed to be as starkly prepared as a stage-set. There were too few people about. Apart from the man working on the yacht I could see only two other people: one was a man standing with a glass of beer in the doorway of the local pub, and the other was stretched out along a ladder, apparently repairing the tiles of a roof. There were one or two parked cars on the quay, but none as far as I could see, had anyone inside.

I stared out across the mud-flats. The man continued with his painting.

A few minutes later I saw Charles Greystone walking along the quay towards me. He was wearing a Harris tweed jacket, open-necked shirt, and slacks. As he came up to me I heard a tile skid down the roof, and a second later it shattered on the pavement below.

Harry! Good to see you! Greystone pumped my hand.

'Shall we walk?' I said.

'This way.'

Where the main street of the village came down at a right-angle to join the quay, a broad area of concrete had been laid, leading down to the mud-flats. From here the dirt path I had seen earlier led alongside one of the narrow waterways towards the distant sea. It was cooler out here, and I zipped up the front of the anorak.

I noticed that the man with the paint-brush had again moved round to the cabin, and was standing with his head inside the doorway. As Greystone and I passed within ten yards of the upturned yacht, the man straightened. He was holding a can of beer. He sat down and leaned against the hull, staring absently towards the village.

'It's going to be OK, Harry, I've cleared everything.'

'What do you mean?' I said.

'I've fixed it that we'll both give separate press-conferences tomorrow. Later in the week, we'll give written statements to the newspapers.'

I admired Charles Greystone more, I think than any other man I had ever known. It was not only chance that had brought us to the present state of joint overall responsibility for the British government; his appointment as head of the American economic delegation had been partly as a result of my influence. We had worked well together in the five years I had been in office, and for four and a half of those years Greystone had been with me in London.

'What good would a statement do?' I said. 'We can't change what has already happened.'

'No . . . but it will bring it into the open.'

'And that would be an answer?'

We were now about five hundred yards from the village, and I noticed another man. He was sitting in a small dinghy, holding a fishing-rod. He had his back turned towards us, and did not look in our direction.

'We've broken the law, Charles,' I said. 'There's nothing to be done about that except take the consequences.'

'You want to go to jail?'

'Not particularly.'

'Then we have to bluff this thing out. The law was broken by us inadvertently, not by intent. The real culprits have been arrested, and will be charged tomorrow. But you and I are both honourable men.'

'You still believe that?' I said.

As we passed the man in the dinghy both of us had lowered our voices; he seemed, however, quite oblivious of our presence. As we walked, I was keeping an eye open for other people; the only person I could see was a middle-aged woman with a dog, walking slowly towards us along the path.

'Listen, Harry, the frauds were committed by subordinates.'

'We're responsible for their actions.'

'But not to carry the can for them.'

'I think we are,' I said.

I glanced over my shoulder. We were now about a hundred yards beyond the man in the dinghy, but he had laid aside his rod and was rowing slowly down the channel behind us. The woman approaching us along the path was less than two hundred yards away.

I noticed a second path, leading away from the channel and across the flats towards the next waterway.

'Let's go this way, Charles,' I said.

'What the hell for?'

I didn't answer, but took the other path. After a few moments' hesitation, Charles followed.

I said: 'Did you know they've coined a new word?'

'Who have?'

'The newspapers. To "murdochise". It means to place economic expediency before political responsibility. In the left-wing press it also means to look to American finance for support. I'm in the company of Charles Boycott and Thomas Bowdler, neither of whom I much admire.'

I was Harold Murdoch, Prime Minister of Britain.

'So that's a problem? Politicians have always been the whipping-boys of the press. Back in the States I was known as The Pusher. It doesn't mean anything.'

'It has done to me.'

There was a rise of ground ahead of us, and we walked up the path to its summit. We halted here for a moment, and I took the opportunity to look back.

The man in the dinghy was standing up, staring in our direction. As soon as he realised I had spotted him he bent over a small outboard motor in the stern, and pulled the starting-cable. The engine fired at once and he sat down, steering the dinghy down the waterway towards a broader expanse of water which would take him, by a long route, to the other side of the mud-flat we were crossing.

The woman with the dog had not changed direction, and was still walking slowly towards the village.

Greystone said: 'We've got to agree what to do.'

'You've made up your mind?'

'Yes I have. What about you?'

I nodded. 'I made up my mind even before this crime was brought to my notice.'

'What have you decided to do?'

'Resign. I've already drafted my letter to the King.'

'For God's sake, Harry! There's no need for that!'

'Lower your voice,' I said.

As we walked down the further slope we came across a young couple, who were sitting close together in the long grass. The young man was wearing a dark suit that seemed to me to be quite inappropriate for flirtatious activities here — I could see flecks of dried mud on his jacket — and the girl was wearing a dress of bright yellow material. We had apparently surprised them, for as soon as we appeared the girl reached over hastily to an expensive looking radio, and turned a knob on its side. In a moment I heard snatches of music.

'Harry, don't resign. You're by far the best man for the job.'

'Not any more, I'm afraid. There will always be an indelible stain on my reputation.'

'But don't you see that there needn't be? OK, if you like we're both morally responsible for what happened, but that's no reason to throw in every damned thing. Act positively . . . that's what has gotten you to where you are today. You've got the power and the position to fight back. Go on television, make public statements. Deny any knowledge or responsibility, and challenge people to prove otherwise. Or, if you prefer, admit moral culpability and hint that you might have to resign. Come to think of it, that's probably the best way. The people will back you to the hilt.'

'Maybe so, Charles,' I said. 'You're probably right . . . but I couldn't do that. I would know that I was obstructing justice.'

'It's the only way.'

'And that's what you intend to do?'

'Yes with you or without you. I'd rather have you at my side, but even if I have to go it alone I'll fight for what I see as truth.'

'Even as you admit to me you're guilty of a misdemeanour.'

'A technical misdemeanour,' he said.

We walked on.

As Greystone once more went over his attitude to the consequences of the fraud, my mind was occupied with other matters. I had long been considering the possibility of resignation: I had no feeling of overall mandate any more, and only a deep suspicion that I alone could retain some sense of independence for my country had delayed the decision thus far. The Anglo-American Economic Recovery Program (AMERP) was my master, and Charles Greystone as its Director my superior. I knew, although precious few members of the Cabinet did, that within five years the last ties with Europe and the Commonwealth would be severed, and that from then it was only a matter of time before Britain became the 51st State of the Union.

'We have only to stand up and name names,' Charles was saying. 'Tell me why you can't do that.'

'There's no reason,' I said. 'Not now the *sub judice* rule has been suspended. There's always the risk of libel; that Act is still on the Statute Book.'

'You're old-fashioned, Harry.'

'Yes.'

The path came to an end by the edge of the next waterway and we stopped here,

looking along the bleak, ugly coastline towards Cley, the next village. In a few moments I heard the distant sound of a small engine, and saw the dinghy sailing around the mud headland. The man steering it already held the fishing-rod extended in his hand.

'Let's go back,' I said, and without waiting for Charles I walked back in the direction we had just come.

The dinghy swung round sharply, and chugged back towards the headland.

'How are you fixed for time?'

'A few more minutes,' I said.

'What do you hope to achieve by resigning?'

I considered this for a moment. 'It would enable me to retain what personal honour was left.'

'It would be an admission of guilt.'

'Not necessarily. What about you? What would you achieve by making your position public?'

'I would clear my name.'

'Even though in private you admit technical culpability.'

There was no sign of the couple as we passed the spot in which we had seen them, but in a moment I caught a sight of the girl: her yellow dress was the only flash in sight. She was alone now, and hurrying towards the village. I wondered what had become of her boyfriend.

'Harry, to resign now — at this point in time — would only make people wonder what else you were hiding. I suggest you come under public scrutiny with the palms of your hands spread wide.'

'And look people in the eye and admit I was an accessory to a million-pound fraud? Yes . . . and then I go back to my office and expect them to believe that I am still a responsible official? Listen, Charles, you called me old-fashioned just now. Maybe you're right, but I'd rather think of myself as a traditionalist. It's British tradition for a public figure to resign his position if caught in the wrong.'

We had reached the original waterway, and I went over to one of the beached sailing-yachts and leaned against its side. Over my head the wind rattled through the taut rigging. Greystone stood near me, his hands thrust deep into his trouser pockets. I looked beyond him to where the waterway opened out.

In a minute or two the dinghy rounded the headland once more, and chugged steadily towards the village. I watched it idly, wondering whether to suggest to Greystone that we should once more walk back across the flats. Suddenly, the young man jumped out from the side of the path. He crouched low and waved to the man in the dinghy. Immediately, the boat steered over to him. As the dinghy scraped its bottom in the shallows the young man shouted something, then clambered into the boat.

Once more it headed in our direction. By the time it passed us the two men had changed places; the young man was steering the dinghy, and the other man was preparing the fishing-rod for his first cast. The expensive radio might or might not have been in the boat with them; I could not see it.

'Harry, you're a damnable hypocrite. Do you realise that? When the chips are down

you won't face up to your responsibilities.'

'Most politicians are by nature hypocritical,' I said.

'Let me tell you about you British. You have some crazy idea of honour, that it and it alone is the right thing. If honour stands in the way of truth, or facts, then that's just too bad. You and I are in identical situations, but you won't face the facts, and I will. That's the difference. You run away from them, and I stand up to them. You retreat into smugness, whereas I'm prepared to stand under the lights and bare my soul that the people of your country and mine may decide whether or not I'm fit to do my job.'

'Some things are better left unknown.'

'You aren't in a position to decide that.'

'Who is?' I said. 'The gutter press?'

'If necessary, yes. At least they deal in facts.'

We stood in silence for a minute or two. In the background I was aware that the motor had cut out, and now the dinghy was drifting slowly a hundred yards from where we stood.

'What you mean,' I said in the end, 'is that if I resign you will lose credibility.'

'If you resign it will make the quest for the truth that much more difficult. But the truth can't be evaded. The people you govern have a constitutional right to the facts.'

'I'm afraid they haven't,' I said. 'This country doesn't have a legislated constitution.'

'Then the sooner we write one the better,' said Greystone.

'That's what I was afraid you would say.'

We started back towards the village.

I observed that the roof-repairs were now complete, for although the ladder was still in place there was no sign of the men. It also appeared that the repainting of the yacht had been abandoned half-completed.

'So you're adamant,' said Greystone.

'Yes.'

'Don't you have any regrets?'

'None whatsoever. I shall not enjoy my audience with the King, and some of my colleagues will be disappointed, but I'm already looking forward to retirement, I don't see much of my family.'

As we walked up the sloping concrete towards the quay, Greystone made one last attempt.

'Harry . . . think what you're doing. No one can do your job better.'

'I know,' I said, knowing also who would step in to take my place.

'Have you considered the long-term consequences?'

'For myself?'

'For Britain.'

'I don't see that my presence is going to make any difference one way or another. I don't envy you the problem of how you will depose the monarchy, but I'm sure you'll find a way. That's what you meant, wasn't it?'

'That's what I meant,' said Greystone. 'I don't want that any more than you do.'

'It's inevitable,' I said. 'America and Britain are both in economic ruin. America will recover first because its reserves are

continued over

The Invisible Men—Priest

deeper. I think you should be able to pick up the old country rather cheaply. Bankrupt stock is usually sold off to the first bidder, not the highest.'

'You sound as if you're resigned to it.'

For the first time since Greystone had arrived my temper wavered.

'I've been having to live with the prospect for years,' I said. 'Gradually, I've seen my country being turned into a suburb of yours. I'm not going to say whether I think that's a good thing or a bad, but I will say this: No, I'm not resigned to it because it will not, in the end, be the answer. Your system of government works in America; not perfectly, but it does work. It will never work here. What's happened in the last few days has convinced me of that, and your reaction now only confirms that conviction. You can go in front of the cameras tomorrow with your palms spread wide, and maybe you'll convince a few people of your good faith. I'm not anti-American, Charles. You and I could never have worked so well together in the past if that were so. I have a deep and abiding respect for your country, but both Britain and America have changed since the time of George III. You can't introduce your country's methods here and hope for success. That's all.'

Greystone said: 'Maybe our methods would work a damned sight better than yours have done. Who is bailing out whom?'

'Who is to say? I remember that a few years ago an earlier government tried to solve an Irish problem with British methods. That didn't work either.'

At the edge of the quay behind us, the dinghy scraped its side and the two men climbed out. Ignoring Greystone and myself, they walked towards the pub on the corner. The young man was carrying the radio set.

I said to Greystone: 'Just one moment.'

I hurried over to the two men and caught the arm of the man I had first seen in the dinghy.

'Could you tell me the time please?' I said.

He looked at me in surprise, then glanced at his wristwatch.

'Twenty minutes past four, sir,' he said, and made to move on after his companion.

'Thank you. Good fishing today?'

He shook his head, and walked on. I went back to Greystone.

'What was all that about?' he said.
'I wanted to find out if he was English or American.'

'Well?'

'He was an Englishman.' I looked at my own wristwatch: the man's had been ten minutes slow. 'Maybe I'm wrong in what I think, Charles. Only time will tell.'

'I've got to leave, Harry. You know where you can reach me tonight if you reconsider?'

'Yes . . . but I've made up my mind. I wish you well.'

'And I wish you well, Harry.'

We shook hands; Greystone's grip was firm and sincere.

'I'm sorry it had to come to this, Harry.'

'It was our own fault,' I said. 'The crime would not have happened if we'd been more alert.'

'Which crime do you mean?'

'The fraud, of course.'

Greystone released my hand, and I turned away. I headed for the main street of the village. My car would be waiting for me at the top of the hill. As I passed the pub I looked through the doorway.

The bar was closed: the blind had been erected over the counter, and the lights were out. However, the people inside the pub had managed to get some drinks from somewhere, for they stood or sat inside the semi-darkened room with filled tankards. I recognised some of the people: the young man had been reunited with his girlfriend, and they stood together with their backs against the counter blind. I saw the woman's dog, tied by its leash to the leg of one of the tables, but its owner was sitting at another table with the man who had been painting the yacht.

Just inside the door I saw the man who had been in the dinghy. He was looking in Greystone's direction, speaking quietly into the radio communicator pressed to his lips.

He paid no attention to me as I stared at him, and for a moment I was tempted to go over to him and provoke some kind of petty incident. Instead, I turned on my heel and hurried after Greystone.

'One more thing,' I said to him as I caught him up.

'What?'

'From tomorrow afternoon I'll be a private citizen. Can I have your personal guarantee that your damned agents will not be hanging around me all the time?'

Greystone looked at me steadily. For a moment he said nothing, and I wondered if he would have any reply at all to make.

Then he said: 'Maybe you should resign, Harry. Paranoia doesn't become you.'

The following day, in a private suite at Buckingham Palace, I watched Greystone's televised press-conference. Even as he spoke openly and frankly to the newsmen jostling to place the next question, my mind held only the memory of him walking away past the looted shops and broken windows of Blakeney village, blind, or rendered blind to the organisation around him.

Christopher Priest 1974



CHRISTOPHER PRIEST

Christopher Priest has written six novels, the latest of which 'The Affirmation' was published in hardcover by Fabers in June, and one non-fiction book. He has had two short story collections published 'Real Time World' NEL 1974 and 'An Infinite Summer' Fabers 1979.

He became a full-time writer in 1968 and his first novel, 'Indoctrinaire', was published two years later.

This story 'The Invisible Men' was first published in an anthology entitled 'STOPWATCH' edited by George Hay seven years ago and is reprinted here for the first time in a magazine.

EXPLORATION

Reluctantly,
The first grey shafts of dawn
Creep down
From a sky of lead.
While shivering we load
The half-tracks.
The sleet tricks
Its way into our suits
And makes sure that none of us sweats.

The engines cough into life.
The drivers settle down and laugh
At us from the warmth of their cabs;
Some of them are swathed in fur, like cubs.

Orders crackle
Through the static. We nearly cockle
Over as the half-track
Surges forward and we begin our trek.

The plastic bubbles of the Base
Fall behind, the Boss
Stands waving at us
As we bounce along; soon he is
Out of sight. Behind, the marker beacons
Bleep. Ahead, the horizon beckons.

John Francis Haines

Interview

OCTOBER 16TH 1980; Birmingham is wetter than Manchester for once. Stephen Donaldson is making a personal appearance in a local bookstore to promote his latest novel, 'The Wounded Land', the first volume in the Second Chronicles of Thomas Covenant.

Donaldson is something of a publishing phenomenon in the world of Fantasy; the First Chronicles of Covenant, a trio of thickish books, sold in the region of 1/2 a million paperbacks in this country and the quality of 'The Wounded Land' suggests that the second series will be just as successful. Certainly, his author tour would indicate that he is reaching out into a market not normally associated with fantasy; we were told that on his appearance at a store in Glasgow earlier in the week, the queue for signed copies had extended out of the shop and halfway down the street.

Donaldson is a personable young chap in his early thirties and seems the epitome of a young pipe-smoking college professor, but isn't. He came across as a very articulate and intelligent man indeed.

Our thanks must go to him for sparing us 1/2 an hour, to Helen Ellis of Fontana for setting it up and to Dave of Andromeda Books for coffee and sympathy. What follows is a fairly faithful transcript of the interview.

EXTR 0: Do you see yourself as a cult figure?

SD: Well, I tend to think of cults as things which grow up around books which aren't really popular. I know that in the U.S.A. we have H. P. Lovecraft cults and Robert E. Howard cults and the people who like them tend to be pretty avid, but in terms of a general audience they're relatively unknown. Why else have a cult? It doesn't seem to me to be psychologically normal to form a cult around a book which is already accepted. I haven't experienced anything which would lead me to believe that there are Donaldson cults. I think that the impression that there are cults stems from the fact that

"I could never have written 'Lord of the Rings'; If I tried to I would do it badly. I could never write those emotions."



these books became popular essentially through people talking to each other . . . by word of mouth, which I find immensely gratifying as a writer, but I suspect that it's not the same as a cult.

EXTR 0: 500-page novels are often thought of as being cumbersome or unwieldy. Were you ever worried about a slow reaction to your books because of this?

SD: Well, my personal fear was that the length of the books might make it hard for me to find a publisher who would buy them. In fact that was true for many years; I went for a long time without being able to sell my first trilogy which was why when it first appeared, it all came out together. However, after it was published, everything was gravy and I didn't care how long it took to catch on. The publishers, particularly in the U.S.A., took the attitude that it would take a while to get accepted.

EXTR 0: In your preface to 'The Wounded Land', the dedication says 'For Lester'

Del Rey; he made me do it.' Are you saying that he made you write the sequel?

SD: This was really a humorous statement. There's a whole line of comedians in the States who have these jokes which end with the line 'The devil made me do it.' and I knew that Lester would understand that so I chose that phrase. I dedicated it to Lester because he was the only U.S. editor with the courage to accept my first trilogy, but also because in a certain sense it was his idea that I should do further books. Naturally, he's an editor and he has a clear idea of his own financial advantage and by and large series books sell well.

EXTR 0: Did you want to do more Covenant books?

SD: No, I thought it was a terrible idea. He said, "Gee, Steve write some more," and I said (Mock-dramatic) "My God who do you think I am?" Every now and then he would write me a letter and in it it would be a suggestion for an idea for a new trilogy. These

ideas were just awful; it would make you weep to see just how bad some of them were. What he wanted to do was to trigger me, to start me thinking and one of them did that; it was so bad, it just set me thinking 'No, that's really awful, what I really ought to do is like so' and that was it.

EXTR 0: This was deliberate?

SD: Oh God, yes. Lester is a very cagey man. It still took me a year and a half to actually begin work; I was very apprehensive about doing a sequel. There were so many ways it could go wrong and there were so many ways people could convince themselves it had gone wrong even if it hadn't. I had to be very sure in my own mind that I had a story worth telling before I could begin.

EXTR 0: What made you build the Chronicles concept around a leper?

SD: The two seeds which started the whole thing were leprosy and unbelief. Everything else stems from that. It was just the conjunction of ideas I'd had in my head for about 3 1/2 years. The idea of Unbelief came first and at a crucial time the leprosy idea joined it. That was the genesis of the whole thing for me.

EXTR 0: Your publicity handout states that you first conceived of the character of Covenant after hearing your

**An Interview
with
STEPHEN
DONALDSON**

continued over

Stephen Donaldson

father giving a speech about leprosy. Was it just the physical manifestations of the disease which interested you or the mental aspects, or do you consider the two irretrievably intertwined?

SD: In my head the character of Thomas Covenant started as a compendium of all the mental ills a leper can suffer from, but really I'm much more interested in leprosy as a metaphor than as a physical disease; a metaphor for how people feel about each other and about themselves and that ties in with the whole concept of evil that's promulgated in these books. I put all that physical stuff in because leprosy has become a very unfamiliar disease and a lot of my readers wouldn't understand the psychological ramifications of the disease unless I presented the physical aspects of it as vividly as I could.

EXTRo: Was there any particular person who inspired Covenant's character?

SD: No; I mean I've known lepers. Out in India we had a leper hospital and a mission hospital dedicated to fighting the social stigma of the disease and the whole thing was treated as being a very normal part of everyday life. In a country where leprosy is common you can diagnose it and treat it much earlier, so people go to the doctor and they get treated before they become ugly or hideous, they're taught how to take care of themselves, they're taught skills, the hospital hires them, others hire them, all with the result that the community in which I grew up, every other gardener and every other mechanic was a leper.

EXTRo: Do you feel the need to 'campaign' for a broader public awareness of leprosy or is it just a literary tool?

SD: Essentially it's a literary tool I don't see how this is a situation in which anyone suffering from leprosy would necessarily benefit from any campaigning on my part.

EXTRo: No, but working on the basis that knowledge is power, surely a broader public awareness of the disease would be of some use.

SD: What kind of power are

"The two seeds which started the whole thing were leprosy and unbelief. Everything else stems from that."



we talking about?

EXTRo: Well, in the sense that pollution was the concern of an informed few who gradually brought it to the attention of the general public, until now it can be front page news across the world.

SD: Yeah, but we're faced with a different kind of problem here. What benefit does the average leper gain from a wider public awareness of his problem?

EXTRo: Well, perhaps financing for new clinics, more research . . .

SD: Strangely enough, it's not really a problem, something which I find hard to believe. They have separate hospitals, there's a whole branch of the U.S. Public Health Service dedicated to the problem, there's plenty of research grants . . .

EXTRo: Well, we're used to shoestring budgets in this country, you understand.

SD: Well, it's not that much of a problem, only 100 new cases every year out of a population c 250 million, but I see your point; if you dramatise it enough, maybe there'll be money . . . maybe there'll be a backlash . . . anyway it's not a social problem I feel equipped to handle.

work, I could never have written 'Lord of the Rings'; if I tried to, I would do it badly. I could never write those emotions.

EXTRo: It strikes me that one of the main differences between your work and Tolkien's is that Covenant is a very modern figure, a Modern Man, whereas Tolkien's characters always seem to be less important than the deeds which they perform, rather like characters from mythology or legend . . .

SD: Yes, I think that's very true; in emotional terms, all of the Tolkien stuff is very backward-looking, looking back to the creation of the world and saying 'That's when things were good.', then there's this steady progress of things becoming less beautiful, less powerful until we reach human beings who are the bottom of the evolutionary scale; from here y'know, there's rats and then darkness. I don't think my books are like that; they're more forward-looking. I have no desire to write a 'Silmarillion'; a 'prequel'. I never think about what happened in the Land 'before', I'm more interested in 'what happens next'.

EXTRo: Is it true that you have plans for a third trilogy to follow this one?

SD: It is true that when I conceived the idea for a second trilogy, this in turn implied a whole series of other ideas which could well make an interesting third trilogy. I have a wonderfully grand scheme in my head which if I could follow it through well enough would essentially be one novel spread across nine volumes; it has the possibility of being a complete and unified story on those terms. So, there's a story there and I do want to do it, but having said that these books are very hard to do and they do take up an awful lot of my life, so I'm not making any commitments beyond this current trilogy. At the end of this trilogy, I'll be in a position to either leave it there or continue with my Grand Scheme if I feel like it . . .

EXTRo: You'll have the publishers straining for adjectives . . .

SD: Oh, eventually, they'll publish editions of Tolkien

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which say 'Comparable to Donaldson.' I did once see a book which was hyped as being for fans of Donaldson, but it really was a bad book . . .

EXTRO: Is the geography of the Land arbitrary, or did you have somewhere specific in mind?

SD: The geography grew up entirely to suit my needs as a storyteller. I have no place in this world or any other particularly in mind. As a matter of fact, one of the things I need to be able to control most as a writer is geography. For some strange reason it's crucial to my imagination.

EXTRO: Am I right in thinking that the Covenant books are your first published?

SD: That's right.

EXTRO: But presumably there's been stuff in periodicals . . .

SD: No, I had nothing published until 'Lord Foul's Bane'. I've got ½ a million words of fiction in my filing cabinet which was done before 'Lord Foul's Bane', but none of it ever got published.

EXTRO: The Second Chronicles have already shown some startling departures from the first. for instance, how did you arrive at the character of Linden Avery? Did you feel that innovations of this kind were necessary?

SD: Taking it backwards, I felt that new departures were absolutely vital. The one thing I couldn't bear was merely to re-hash the first trilogy, after all that thing is 1400 pages long and if I were to merely re-hash it, it would begin to smell like a rip-off. I needed to believe, if only for my own self-respect that I had a new story which thematically went beyond the first trilogy.

Linden Avery herself is like leprosy; I didn't really have a story until she appeared. She's the joker that changes the game and makes it a different issue altogether for Covenant; now he has a real live human being that he has to work out a relationship with. Of course, she has potentials and difficulties too, which tend to scramble things up a bit as well.

EXTRO: At the end of 'The Wounded Land', Covenant

"I have a wonderfully grand scheme in my head which if I could follow it through well enough would essentially be one novel spread across nine volumes."



seems to be bound for what we might call 'terra incognita'. Does this reflect a belief that the geographical scope of the books needed to be widened as well?

SD: Oh, I felt all along that it would need to be widened a bit and I felt that this was the right time to do it. If you think of my 9-book grand scheme, the next book, will be the middle one; that's just a structural reason for broadening it. Other reasons; the Sunbane is a fairly potent problem for Covenant to deal with, but it's static; the source isn't necessarily obvious, so until he can get a few questions answered, there's little he can do about it. So, in purely pragmatic story-telling terms, I felt that we needed a change of scene, and then I've always wanted to push out into the outer world a little more . . .

EXTRO: So, that means new maps?

SD: Yeah, there will be maps . . . it's like getting a whole new gene pool to draw characters from.

EXTRO: In the new book, Covenant seems to have made his peace with his own rage self-doubt, self-hatred somehow. Is this because the Land itself seems equally diseased or is there some

other reason for this newfound equilibrium?

SD: Primarily, I would say that it's because of what he achieved in the first trilogy. He resolved all kinds of issues there. In this first confrontation with Lord Foul he learned an awful lot about what matters to him, so the whole thing about Unbelief which dominated the first trilogy is now a vanished issue. He's a much more resolved character and no longer has to endure the torments which plagued him in the first three books, which in many ways makes him more sympathetic and easier to get along with. The story no longer revolves around his confusion or his priorities, it's a different kind of story.

EXTRO: The presence of the Earthpower concept in the books seems to imply some concern on your part about environmental issues. Would this be true?

SD: Part of what I'm trying to achieve in fantasy is to construct metaphors for issues which I think are important in the so-called 'real' world. In the Land it's literally true that physical reality is the source of all power. In a less obvious way that is just as true of the world we're living in. Another reason I'm

writing a Sunbane story about the Land is because of my concern with the physical danger our planet is in. I'm very proud of my first trilogy, but thematically it has certain limitations. Lord Foul is presented as a very conventional Fantasy villain; he has a bunch of armies full of miscreant warriors and he wants to go conquer — it's very much Hitler. But the kind of physical corruption of the environment our culture engages in is a much more insidious form of the same kind of evil; contempt for the Land, the future, other people — it doesn't matter how much we crap up the world today, as long as we're comfortable, that's OK. But you can't fight that kind of evil with armies or moral indignation; you have to come up with a different kind of solution, and that's really what Covenant's confronted with here; there's no obvious villain, just wholesale corruption of the environment, so to save the Land, he's going to have to learn something new about the nature of evil.

EXTRO: Who are your primary influences as a writer?

SD: Well, I went through the usual English Major Graduate School mill and the writers who most consistently held my awe and imagination are Joseph Conrad, Henry James and William Faulkner. It was studying those guys that taught me all my presuppositions as to what constitutes good writing and then when I stumbled into Tolkien, I just took all that mainstream literary learning, moved it two notches to the right and applied it to a different kind of writing. I am a fantasy writer and will continue to be so; I don't envisage any Donaldson mainstream novels appearing, but I'll always judge my work by those mainstream standards rather than by any others.

EXTRO: When did you first start work on the Covenant books?

SD: Well, I first started in May of 1972, but it was March of '76 before I got a favourable word from a publisher. I finished doing rewriting for that publisher in March of '77, so it was five years of my life in all.

sumi dreams of a paper frog

by
garry
kilworth

bamboo

one of the comforting things about being in a war is, you know it isn't real, especially night sentry. you work, eat and sleep so close to death, you become part of it, and everyone knows that death isn't real, death is another world, the final unknown country of the soul and those sort of places are fantasy, death to me is a place of shadows, a dark river flowing through a dark land, and quiet, unnaturally quiet, unreal.

night sentry never made any sense to me, you stand out in the open, as exposed as a carton on a wall, waiting to be punctured, a kind of sacrifice to a killer with random tastes. if he didn't kill you, it was like being lucky at russian roulette. it couldn't last indefinitely, all you could hope for was a stay of execution, a near miss, or that it would be the man next to you. every night, ostensibly you are guarding stores, or ammunition, or 'planes, but you know the enemy has enough of his own. what he wants is death. mine, yours, anyone's but his and his kind, so we oblige him by standing men outside in the open, inviting his mark. it would have made more sense to protect the men, using the supplies to build a barricade around them, surrounding them while they live out their individual fantasies. then they would only dream of being a naked target on a wide landscape. they wouldn't

be silhouettes. cardboard cutouts.

you spend those long, long night hours — a lifetime of hours — wondering what the enemy is like out there, staring into the darkness you wonder if he will appear as a man or like some terrible angel, spitting death through his teeth. the other night i saw a man die. he slapped his face as if he'd been bitten by a mosquito, then he seemed to fold in on himself, like a paper doll pressed by an unseen hand. it seemed i stood there for an age, staring at his body without comprehending, then i put out my hands, palms outwards into the night and said, 'no', just that, as if i could protect myself from their weapons with the power of a gesture.

if the chances of being killed on night sentry are high, the odds shorten considerably if you smoke a cigarette. there are a dozen reasons, beyond this survival factor, why you shouldn't smoke, it is forbidden and carries heavy penalties: extra night duties.

if you are holding a cigarette in your hand, it increases the time it takes to aim your rifle, the smell of smoke carries miles and however hard you try to blanket the lighted end with your hand the small red dot will be visible to the enemy at some time, other reasons. yet you still smoke, you smoke because you are afraid of the possibility of dying and you turn that possibility into a probability by smoking. you also

smoke because you are bored, you are bored and afraid, and these two emotions are entirely compatible, they interlace in the unreal wickerwork of war.

i always think of the enemy as bamboo. there are 1000 varieties of bamboo in the world and that might be the number of guises the enemy adopts. bamboo is strong and resilient, it grows thick, fast and replaces itself rapidly, it is segmented and it has a thousand uses, from prison bars to chess pieces to kendo swords. it is the peasant and the king, it is hollow, it is a native of this land, it is invincible.

i always think of the enemy as bamboo.

you learn to beware of beauty, many sunsets pass before your eyes, and many dawns, mostly beautiful but all treacherous. with dusk and dawn comes twilight, half-light is worse than no light, it tricks the eyes with its strange movements, also a false sense of peace security. you relax, allow the redness of the sky to engulf you, and it will engulf you, it does to remember the colour of blood.

foolishness does not start and end with twilight, i have seen beauty at night, formed out of arcing lights, silent, white pieces of brilliance have made rainbow curves over my head and i have wonderingly admired them, when there is no accompanying sound it takes more than a few seconds to recognise tracer, even when it is aimed at you, afterwards your teeth chatter with the cold and your shirt soaks up the sweat, beauty betrays you to death, i am wary of all colours but black.

paper

i always think of myself as paper, a product of slim fingers skilled in origami, so, i have the appearance of a real creature but i am really only folded paper filled with air, wounds cannot harm me, are not fatal, nothing but total destruction will affect my life force, if i can believe this i am safe.

on night sentry, the rifle weighs heavy in your arms, there are many left-handed sentries, this is because the bolt, with which you cock the weapon, protrudes from the right side of the rifle; thus it can be hooked on the belt and bear the weight. the rifle weighs eleven pounds, over a period of two hours the poundage increases alarmingly but always the weapon must be pointed, out into the night, this is in the regulations.

the enemy must be given all the advantages, a noise, a shape, an approach, must all be challenged three times before you are permitted to defend yourself, this is in the regulations.

for me, all sounds are the enemy, inhibited by a conventional upbringing however, i never issue a challenge, i merely stand, listening for further sounds to confirm my fears, when those sounds come i wait for more, sometimes i listen so hard it hurts my ears, once, a comrade called out

"halt, who goes there?" and i almost shot him for filling my head with sound while i was listening for the enemy, instead, they shot him, a second later, i was on a hill and he was below, he fell across the barbed wire fence and hung there, like biltong drying in the moonlight, until we could bring him up at first light.

glass

you may use the night glasses to search for the enemy along distant treetops, he is always nearer than the point you watch, i never use the night glasses, they have within them an even stranger world of fantasy than the one of which i am already part, they show you a grey sham world within the black night, where resemblances live, a tree is a man holding out his arms, a rock is a man hunched against the ground, the figures move within the glass, they move because the hand that holds them moves, or they move because they really are men.

no-one has ever seen a real man though night glasses, real men don't exist inside them, or they do, and the watcher, the man with the glass in his hand, he doesn't exist, it doesn't matter which way it is, the result is oblivion.

drum

the loudest part of my body is my heart, it fills the night with its pounding, they can hear the beating in a far off country called 'home', there are other, smaller drums all over my body, in my wrists, my ears, wherever you walk the drums go with you, signalling your position to the

enemy. your body has other give-away noises. sometimes you hear the 'crack' of a dry stick snapping and start like a dog at a gunshot. then realise it is one of your joints, an elbow or knee. at other times you can hear your eyelids batting together, as a moth at a lamp. once, an explosion stopped all the drums of my body in midbeat. i broke wind, at such times it is difficult to remember you are paper and nothing can hurt you.

creature in the sun, before cooking it over a fire.

fires

you can be forgiven, sometimes, for believing in reality. when there are fires like red flowers a long way off in the night, and you can hear the 'whumph' of distant mortars, the crackle of gunfire, out over the bay, you can be forgiven for thinking that the world is real. that's because the activity appears to be nothing to do with you. it can't touch you, you are safely cocooned by two miles of night and the fear leaves you.

then it all seems real. this is an illusion which is provoked by unguarded moments. before long the silence will drift in with the moonlight and the fires will go out. then your complacency dissipates and the cold fantasy returns. reality is only a dream. behind the lines, there is much to reinforce your belief in fantasy. the atrocity reports that are broadcast each day, of crucifixions and human torches, cannot

be real. they are so grisly, so horrific, the enemy must have one of their kind, a man with a terrible imagination, whose responsibility it is to develop these graphic, fictional executions. perhaps in this war no-one is ever actually killed. perhaps, overnight, they invent the figures of the dead.

'between the hours of midnight and six o'clock, the front for the liberation of the people shot and killed seven of the enemy.'

then, to consolidate the lie, seven men act out their deaths and are taken away from our sight. each supposed death you see confirms this belief. men do not actually die, they merely drop loosely to the earth with the faintest of sighs, their bodies empty of breath. why don't they scream, clinging to life with fingers like claws? the grapevine adds further confirmation. you hear that joe is dead, decapitated by cheesewire between rockets fired in tandem. then, behind the lines three weeks later you see joe on the beach, sunning the face he is said to have lost. none of this is real, this makes it easier for you to be paper.

there are women behind the lines. nurses and welfare ladies. through the glasses you watch them undress at night. your stomach kicks and your throat feels as if a three-inch nail is caught in the windpipe. their breasts have the appearance of alabaster wrapped in tissue. then they unwrap them and unwittingly display them for our benefit, there are a hundred exhalations into the night. the shadows hide multiples of you. but, these are not real women. they are ethereal figures trapped between the lenses of the glasses. occasionally you puzzle over the casing of the binoculars, wondering how they manage to manufacture such wonderful interpreters of need. yet, it is an agony of pleasure. a single glimpse may take two or three hours of waiting. this is not sex, it is nostalgia. nostalgia makes your heart perspire, not your hands, and in your breast the static builds, to be released in a shower of fine, internal sparks when the vision has gone.

them, which still puzzles me because i was attentive, wary. suddenly, he was beside me and i looked into his face and almost greeted him, as one would a stranger who had stopped to ask directions. his face was round, without a smile but not savage with malice: just round, and pleasant. then the whip of bamboo on the back of my neck.

i awoke stretched between the four poles. a frog, a paper frog. i stare at the sky and my belly arches up to meet it. this is because of the bamboo rods which puncture my paper back.

home, too, is now a fantasy. its grasp on reality has slipped and now it is with me in my make-believe world. since it is not real now, it never was. there was never a land called home, just a set of ghosts. my memories of that place that never was are inventions of my mind. there was never a face with blue eyes and blonde hair. there never were two children laughing, except in my head. my mind is full of old photographs of non-existent features.

around me i hear domesticity: the scraping of spoons in tins. i can smell cooked fish. inside me is a continuous internal pain which is so unvarying that it slips beyond my awareness, like the eternal high note of a song, so that i have to concentrate to bring it back to me. i have borrowed this pain. sometimes i stare at a point in the sky and think, 'that must be where the pain belongs' because i know it doesn't belong to me. the pain cannot be mine because i am paper, folded into the form of an amphibious creature. someone has puffed air into my rectum to give me this bulbous shape. inside i am nothing but stale breath: a hollowness punctured by the sharp tips of two dozen bamboo rods. the bamboo is still growing and spiky leaves brush my folded-edge limbs. the live rods bear me up, like an offering, to riverwet cloud hippocampus.

bamboo will grow an inch an hour. flutes, bows and duelling staves. tough as tortoiseshells, sharp as fine, stiff hair. baskets, blowpipes, and scarecrows. strong as malachite, smooth as serpents. candles, boats and cradles. they cut deep slits in my back and pushed the tips inside. i am borne high. the enemy thinks he has a man but all he has is a paper frog. i allow him to believe in his fantasy as i swell, slowly, to draw him inside me.

i will engulf him.

ink

the blackest nights are the brightest.

frogs

they eat frogs here. they tie each limb to a stick and dry the

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death

there is a fantasy deeper than death: the fantasy of capture and subsequent torture. i didn't hear

Garry Kilworth 1981

Slow Harry

Harry might have been slow, but he wasn't stupid . . .

I suppose even that's not quite true: by almost all the yardsticks of the age that suckled him, Harry was very, very slow of wit. After all, was he not one of that unfortunate, there-but-for-the-grace-of-science, one point four per cent that still had to be confined to the Farms. However, his mind would have to have been at a standstill for him not have worked out a method of escape — given access to the shift.

He was less than thirty metres from the door behind which lay his route to the beckoning past. His lanky frame was squeezed into a doorway. Between him and the shift Room were six offices — vacant at the moment, he guessed — and two corridors intersecting with this one. The thrum of computer read-out filtered through to his position from one of those two corridors.

"Damn it all!" he hissed. "Which corridor is it? Who's running the computer?"

He fought to still his breath and listen, but the more he strained to identify the source of the sound, the more it seemed to come from all around him, seeping from the walls to saturate the air and his senses with its threatening song.

Finally he gave up the effort and slowly released his breath, deciding to take the chance. He steel-ed himself to a semblance of relaxation, then walked resolutely, stomach churning, past the first corridor. It was empty.

Slow Harry

fiction
by
Paul Campbell



Slow Harry — Campbell

This time, he allowed the hope to rise, this time I'll make it.

The last time he hadn't. His first attempt to escape the confines of the Farm had led to dismal failure. The Warden had simply checked the date on the dial monitor, despatched two Chaperones and returned, probably chuckling, to his office to await Harry's retrieval. And, of course, Harry had been duly and humiliatingly retrieved — humiliated by the way he'd been gently trundled into the Warden's office, stinking of sweat and fear from the chase; by the way the Warden had sympathetically admonished him; even by the way he'd failed to lose any privileges because — well, hadn't he used a little bit of initiative, and why discipline a fellow for apeing his betters?

He found it bewildering when he thought about it — how they'd patted his head for doing something extraordinary, but refused to credit him with real intelligence, useable intelligence, on the basis of that escape. Hadn't he been the only Farm Boy ever to think of taking the door through to the past? But then, over the years, he'd failed all the tests they'd ever set him: aptitude, vocational, subliminal transference, time logic and social adaptability tests — failed them miserably; he just couldn't be slotted into their specialised jobs, couldn't fit into their well ordered society.

And it took no real initiative to use the Shifts: they were simple devices. If the theory generating them was complex, the switches and the buttons were few, easily readable and tantalisingly pressable.

They were also rare devices. Widespread fears of unleashing paradoxes into time caused the state to follow a policy of non proliferation; only credited, and favoured, researchers were granted licences. Harry was lucky that the Warden was such a researcher, doubly fortunate in that the Warden's radical approach to Farm Management proscribed bars, locks and guards.

Besides, Harry hadn't escaped, just spent two panic ridden hours scurrying around a frightening corner of the sixteenth century before gratefully accepting the bemused ministrations of his captor/rescuer.

The memory still rankled and, as he walked nervously past the second corridor, even his determination to succeed on this occasion could do little to combat its poison eating away at his ego. Only actual success, only the taste of freedom... "They won't stop me," he said aloud. "I won't let them stop me."

"That you, Steyna?"
The voice startled Harry and

his initial reaction was to push himself against the wall, to try to fade into the background and hope he wouldn't be noticed. But he fought the panic and grasped hold of the thought that, so far, he'd done nothing wrong. They wouldn't believe he could be so stupid a second time.

"Steyna, you out there?"

"No, Mossley," answered Harry. "It's me! Harry!"

"Harry?" A snorting laugh, then, "Come in, Harry, and let's have a chat." The voice was coming from an office two doors down from the Shift Room. Reluctantly Harry approached. Mossley, a pale young

Harry gritted his teeth. Best not answer. Best to get out. But he couldn't hold back his anger any longer. "I'm not a boy," he said weakly. "I'm twenty years old. Leave me alone!" Inwardly he groaned: why couldn't he say his anger the way he felt it?

"Harry, you're being silly. Leave you alone? I can't do that. I'm here to help you. We all are. You'd find life very frightening if we weren't around to protect you. Who was it rescued you the last time you ran off, saved you from being battered to death by a mob of downtime hooligans? It was me, Harry! Me! And our own society, the big, bad world

They wouldn't believe he could be so stupid a second time.

Chaperone with a lopsided mouth and narrow, darting eyes, was hunched over a console, poring over a reel of print-out. When Harry appeared he looked up.

"Well, Harry, what are we doing inside in weather like this? I'd have thought we'd be out on the track — practising. We need the practice, don't we, Harry? Are we still keeping the others in sight?"

Harry grunted. There was no answer to Mossley's nastiness.

"You should be trying the exercise suite. Keep you toned up. Or the Art classes? No? That's right, Harry, I haven't seen any of your work on display. Not got much flair for Art, have you? You favour the track. Well, I suppose if you stick at it long enough it might begin to favour you." He allowed his rapidly moving eyes to rest for a moment on Harry's truculent features. Then he sighed: Harry hadn't been much of a conversationalist since his trip downtime had deflated him. "There's not much point talking to you while you're sulking Harry. Run along and find someone else to play with."

Harry turned quickly towards the door, anxious to escape not only this room and its taunting occupant, but to run away from everything — the insults, the corridors, the meaningless classes, the unrelenting humiliation.

The Chaperone read Harry's haste as fear; Harry was in awe of him. Mossley relished such fearful respect. "Bit of advice before you go," he sniped. "Don't go getting yourself into trouble again, will you, Harry? Just remember to be a good boy. We Chaperones are very busy people. We don't have time to go rescuing you every time you decide to run off and leave us. Right, Harry? You won't go adding to my workload, will you?"

outside the perimeter, you wouldn't fit in there either; we protect you from that life as well."

"I'll tell the Warden!" God, thought Harry, is that all I can say to defend myself? Please sir, I'll tell the Warden.

"Tell him what, Harry? That I've been doing my job? Taking an interest in your activities? That I want you to participate in all the wonderful schemes we've devised for you? Now, Harry that's not only ungrateful that's spiteful."

"I'll tell him."

"And he'll sack me, will he? And how many people are willing to come here to work with a bunch of Stupids? Chaperoning isn't a very rewarding job, Harry."

"You're working here, aren't you?" Harry knew that jibe would annoy Mossley. "Couldn't you get a better job?"

For the second time Mossley allowed his gaze to linger on Harry. Perhaps he was wondering if he should bother to lose his temper. If so, he decided against it. He turned to the console and bent again to his work. "Get lost, Harry," he murmured.

Once inside the Shift Room Harry thumbed the privacy device. Let them come after him now! Even if Mossley had noticed the direction he had taken they'd need at least ten minutes to override the security locks. That was all the time Harry wanted. After that he would have all the time in the world. *All the time!*

He surveyed his surroundings. Considering its function the room was incredibly sparse: a two-metre square diaz occupied the centre of the room; the square patch of ceiling above the diaz was intricately mazed by a battery of particle disrupter tubes; to the left was an un-

complicated panel of dials, switches, monitors. The apparatus that had given such impetus to the new science, to the new society, was simple...

That was all that mattered to Harry, that it was simple, that he could operate it. He knew some of the terms, that there were such things as particles, tiny things that could be manipulated in some magical way. He had heard the theories, that the way into different times lay through the Parmenidean Universe, that the way beyond the totality of present reality was not outward, but inward, downward — in and down, weaving through the shock of atoms, crashing through the barrier of nothingness into a reality that could only be experienced by unfeeling equations on scabrous scraps of paper; through this mute, guessed-at universe and upward, outward. Out again...

None of this mattered much to Harry. All that mattered was that the theory and the scientists and the machine and the Warden had opened up his escape route. Out again! He was heading out again.

And this time they'd find it difficult to follow him. He'd learned from failure, learned that the digits on the placement dial would point his path to the trackers. And he'd learned that he probably couldn't survive in a time that he wasn't prepared for.

Now he was prepared. The intensive immersion in sleep tapes should ensure that he adapt to whatever age received him. The long hours grappling with numbers and letters, words and more words, would firmly balance him against the hazards of old time. Even the use of an alias, that should cloak him from the scanners of the date banks — if his main ploy failed, and his pursuers began to suspect his whereabouts.

He crossed to the panel and dropped all the switches except one to the ON position. Then he turned his attention to the placement dial. The counter above it registered 2108. As he hesitantly twisted the dial the digits flickered — 2043 — 2001 — 1983 — 1947 — 1896. The dial spun freely; his memory wasn't faulty. He sighed with relief and brought the counter back to 2108. This was the moment. He became conscious of the sweat coldly beading his forehead and roughly sleeted it away. Was he frightened? He shivered. Despite everything, despite his hatred of the Farm, the lure of the open-field past, he still wasn't sure, he wasn't sure...

Someone pushed against the Shift Room door, then started pounding.

continued over

Fiction

Of course he was sure. He was as prepared as he'd ever be.

Harry threw the last switch and watched as the dance of particles enshrouded the diaz. He grasped the dial lightly and spun it. Without waiting for it to come to rest, he ran forward and dived headfirst into the shimmering field.

A Sporting Chance

"PRIORITY CALL! WARDEN TO 72D! REPEAT: THIS IS A PRIORITY CALL!"

The Warden was reuniting the tapes he'd brought back from the early Twentieth — the Educational Institution series — when the SA aroused him from his absorption. Security Alert! A rare event, only two or three since he'd taken up this position. The last when Harry . . .

As he left the Admin Block he paused to survey the scrambling activity on the Sports Field. A number of Chaperones were stationed around the pits and tracks, monitoring performances in the various events. The Warden concentrated his attention on the competitors. Finally he nodded, suspicion shading towards certainty, then headed briskly in the direction of Block D.

Block D; Room 72! The Shift Room! And Harry hadn't been on the track.

The Warden had been aimlessly brooding for some time now and the possibility that there was another runaway forced him to bring his worries to the forefront of his mind. He knew that the authorities would review his Shift Licence; that, if they didn't revoke it, they'd insist on maximum security for the apparatus. But that, important thought it was, wasn't really his main source of disquiet. It was his job, his growing apathy, his whole damned life.

He'd known, when taking up the position four years ago, that he'd be little better than a — what was that quaint, apt description he'd picked up downtime? Screw? — yes, little better than a screw. But he had imagined he could institute changes, lift or ease most controls within the perimeter, give the Stupids a chance of expanding, responding, perhaps even creating something worthwhile.

His charges weren't really stupid, not by the gauge of History. Sure their IQs were comparatively low, but the Warden placed little value on such measurements. As far as he was concerned they had been discredited for decades, perhaps for a century. No, their IQs

reflected, at least in part, a disaffection with, a slanting away from, the prevalent perceptions of the age. It was their AQs — their Adapt Quotients — which sent them to the Farm and kept them there.

And he wondered for the nth time if he and his colleagues should not be trying to adapt to some of the perspectives of the Stupids.

Fruitless speculation! He could achieve nothing. Any freedoms introduced would be illusory. The Farms were a product of an unstable social system and reforms would be ineffective if society itself were not reformed. The enthusiastic idealism that had taken him to the Farm was being steadily buried by the growing intimations of his impotence. He was a cop and a screw, and relaxing the rules just served to readjust the discipline, paint it with fine colours and make it more acceptable — for a while.

He entered Block D and hurried towards the Shift Room. A nascent part of his nature was hoping that Harry would make it, that events would begin to move — somewhere, anywhere. But he knew better: Harry didn't stand a chance, not in a million years.

The Warden found Mossley and Steyna outside 72D. Mossley, whitey angry, was aiming ineffectual kicks at the door. The Warden could hear him muttering violent, random oaths.

"Think that'll help, Mossley?"

"Huh?" Mossley spun round and the Warden could see bitterness and confusion warring across his features.

"I asked you how long it would take to kick down the door?"

It was their AQ's which sent them to the Farm, and kept them there.

"Uh, sir, I don't know. I mean, it can't be kicked in. You need the sonic master to get in. Nothing else will open it."

The Warden bit back his sarcasm. Why take out his annoyance on this man? He produced the sonic key from his belt, shouldered Mossley and Steyna to one side and ran the key along the length of the jamb. A gentle push and the door swung open.

The disrupter field still pulsed in the middle of the room, but that was all that moved. There was no sign of Harry. The three men approached the apparatus and Steyna read the setting on the placement counter. He turned to the others, a puzzled frown

on his face, then stared again at the reading, "1504! Sometime in March! I don't believe it! Harry's not that stupid. He'd need a whole range of immune shots, apart from anything else, if he's back there. He'd never survive otherwise."

The Warden and Mossley both checked the figures. "1504 it is," moaned Mossley. "That means we'll have to take all the shots ourselves if we're to go after him. That Harry's going to have my arm looking like a sieve. The fool. Oh, he's a Stupid all right."

The Warden's eyes were still fixed on the date. Harry wasn't that big a fool, was he? Maybe, just maybe, he'd gone through with the dial still spinning. No, he wasn't that bright either. Still . . . Maybe. The Warden smiled. We'll have to come after you, Harry. And we'll get you. Pity, because you're using your head this time.

The other two were awaiting orders. "Right, you pair, no point in hanging around. Go get your shots and get kitted out. You're going downtime. Just remember the directives about interfering and . . ."

"Maybe we don't need to go down to the sixteenth to retrieve him, sir," interrupted Mossley. "We can stop him before he goes. I know roughly when he activated the Shift. He left my office at about four o'clock. Suppose . . ."

"He was in your office?" And you teased him and he ran and now you think you've some responsibility for this. That's why you're so angry.

"Yeah. About four. He couldn't have gone through for at least another five minutes. Suppose I go back a bit and surprise him before he activates the Shift?"

"Surprise him? Mossley, it's me you're surprising."

"Sir?"

"Haven't you ever given time travel any consideration? The rest of us have nightmares about what you're suggesting." Seeing Mossley's blank stare he patiently began to explain. "Look, Mossley, I'm here now, aren't I?"

"Yessir," agreed the Chaperone.

"Why am I here? Why did I come over to the Shift Room?"

"Because there was an SA. I sent it out."

"Good! Now, young man, why did you send it out?"

"But you know why, Warden." There was a peevish

anger in the reply. Mossley was evidently bewildered by the direction of the Warden's questions. "I had to get you over here. Harry had escaped."

"Right! So I'm here now and you're here now because Harry escaped. And suppose you go back and stop him escaping? What happens to the five minutes we've just spent here?" He waited for a moment, watching alarmed enlightenment enivne the other's features. "Well?"

"I don't know." "And I don't know, and Steyna doesn't know, and nobody knows, and I don't want to be the first to find out. Not that I could ever find out Mossley, do you understand?"

"However, sir," said Steyna, "there's bound to have been others in this position. someone must have overlapped before."

"Sure, somebody has overlapped. But what can they have learned? Nothing! They went through time with a question and they might have found the answer to the question, but they lost the question. I might even have done it myself; it's not that I don't remember. It's just that if there ever was a time like that, a time that I erased by going back and changing something, then it never was. It didn't, doesn't and won't exist. . . . Perhaps! I don't know and, as I said, I don't want to find out."

"Look at it another way. Suppose you transfer back to the Shift Room, Mossley, the Shift Room as it was twenty minutes ago, and you stop Harry — how did you get there? From this time? From a time that you've effectively wiped out? And who's that in your office? . . . Or were you busily kicking the door down twenty minutes ago?"

And besides, mused the Warden, you deserve a sporting chance, Harry.

"Let's just accept," he continued, "that Harry is downtime. If anything has changed because of his intervention in another age, then it has already changed, and we are existing in Harrytime. I don't want to do anything about that, but I do want Harry back. So you're going downtime after them. We'll get him back — but we'll do it my way."

The Runner

Mona watched the race from the grandstand. She could have been closer to the action. She could have been beside the track, grasping out and screaming as they passed, her blood thriling to the rhythmic poun-

Slow Harry — Campbell

ding of their feet, her senses choking on the taste of their sweat as they stumbled and collapsed beyond the tape. But she wasn't a thriller or a grasper or a screamer, and she almost pitied the girls who huddled excitedly over the warming butts of someone else's sensations.

Harry knew he would win. He no longer needed to struggle.

If she were down there she could have shared Harry's emotions and, if he won, his victory. There was nothing she'd like better to do than to throw her arms around him after a race, to congratulate or to commiserate. But she'd seen the way he clung to his victories, leached the last shreds of gleeful satisfaction from them. Like no other man she knew, he lived for the track. Someday soon, she anticipated, she would have something to give him, something for the sharing. Until then she would not vicariously steal his life.

When he wasn't running she could still see the track reflected in his eyes. But she saw more. She saw a man who appreciated his life, moment by moment, whose enjoyment of being and doing was infectious. When he spoke to her he was shy and hesitant, but at least he spoke to her, not through her or against her as if she were a sounding board for his own ego.

She saw more. She sometimes saw bafflement — and sometimes pain. Yesterday she had been crossing the common with him, chatting, laughing. When he fell behind she turned to find him, paces back, standing, fixedly staring at the children who romped and careered through the trees. There were tears in his eyes.

Why had she said nothing? Because his attitude forbade intrusion? Because he had been isolated in his dejection, fortified? This was what she understood about Harry: like the victories that he grasped so tightly to himself, so also the pains; they were his, he was ready to share himself.

But one day he would open up; of that she was confident.

Into the bell with only one lap to go, Harry allowed himself to relax mentally. With only Kane in front, hugging the inside, Harry knew he would win. He no longer needed to struggle to prevent himself rushing into an early, unassailable lead. He no longer needed a two hundred yard gap between himself and the rest of the field to quell the sickening fear of failure. No external reassurance now required,

his own power, surging through his limbs, told him all that he had known, that he would win, that he could contain his power until the last bend, then breeze past Kane to effortlessly steal the race.

He moved up onto Kane's shoulder. It had been almost six

months now, six months of winning . . . winning . . . winning, and he still had not totally adjusted to it. At the beginning of each race there was always that memory of losing, being a loser, a stupid, wretched, consistent loser. And that memory persisted, even now, urgently whispering to him to drive himself forward, past the others into what he recognised would be an unwise, careless, safe lead. Until the bell. Until the bell woke him from his anxiety and told him he was home, winning, winning again.

The track curved and Kane, knowing this was, as always, Harry's moment, threw his last efforts into shaking Harry off his shoulder. His breath came quickly, ragged and coarse and shallow, and his legs pumped faster until, with a swaying lurch, he lost his rhythm and felt the power of Harry as the latter forced himself cleanly past.

At the line Harry had a ten yard lead.

How the hell does he do it? wondered the coach. How does he move so fast? Where the hell does he get the power from? But coach McCracken was well schooled in the virtues of ignoring the mouths of gift horses and so tried to turn his mind from this unprofitable speculation. Still a nagging doubt tugged at him, had not diminished much since that day, six months previously, when Harry had turned up at the campus track, already togged out, and asked if he could use the facilities. At first the coach had refused: you have to be a student, sonny. But the cast out, hopeless look on the young man's face had begged him to relent. So who the hell would know?

There was no way that the coach would ever forget that day: three fifty eight for an un-paced mile, and his expert eye told him this wasn't anywhere near Harry's best. Well practiced string puller that he had to be, coach McCracken had soon wrangled Harry a grant and a place on one of the less strenuous teacher training courses.

But who the hell was Harry

Mann? Apprehensive at the prospect of some other college arguing a prior claim to his find, the coach had attempted to run a check on him, to uncover some of his past. He had come up with nothing. The admissions office was currently drawing up the yearly student profiles and was making threatening noises about Harry's lack of academic antecedents.

Ah, so what does it matter who he is? thought the coach. I'll find a way to hold onto him.

Harry enjoyed the praise in the dressing rooms afterwards most of all. It wasn't just vanity. He knew that. He knew that his mind exulted and his spirits soared as he strove to answer with a meaningless, modest, "I was nothing." But the shrugged answer wasn't meaningless; he knew that too. The effort taken to win had been next to nothing. It would take a supreme effort on his part now to lose.

"Congratulations, Harry. You really made me look like an old steam roller." Jim Kane's look and voice held no rancour, despite the fact that, for the third time since Harry's arrival on the campus, he had been left practically standing on the last bend; despite the fact that, before Harry's arrival, Kane had been considered the rising young star of the College. "How did you manage to get it all together for that last burst?"

"Oh, I don't know," laughed Harry, easily. "Just lucky I guess, as the actor . . . or was it actress? Or was it the same joke? He'd never been too sure. That one mustn't have been on the sleep tapes.

"Yeah, sure." Kane laughed with Harry; victory for Harry wasn't really a defeat for anybody. "But it's more than luck. Anyway, you know there's a prospect of you being picked for the Olympic Trials later this year?"

"That's right, Harry," said the coach, joining them. "I'll pop you to your rooms later and fill you in on the details."

"Thanks, coach. I'm really grateful."

"You really made me look like an old steam roller."

"Yeah, that'd be something, wouldn't it? To make the Olympic Team?"

Yes, worried Harry, especially if I make the headlines and the headlines are in the databanks uptime.

As Harry strolled back towards his apartment in the

dorm block he had to admit to himself that things couldn't be going better. After an initial panic he had dismissed the notion that the Warden would be scanning the micros of old news headlines. And the computers should be fooled by Harry's alias. No, the Chaperones would spend their time searching back where the dial had stopped spinning. Then they'd give him up as dead — or lost.

And he was dead to that life now. In this life the old fearful Harry was gradually receding, being replaced . . . By me, he cheered. His escape from the Farm had opened up life itself for him. He sang with a joy that in the past, or future, had seemed impossible. Nobody, not even Normals back where he came from, could be so content, so wildly, pulsatingly happy as he was now.

He thought of the long hours, the secret hours, in the Farm library, sweating over old tapes, struggling to learn the essentials of reading and writing. He thought of the long sleep hours, synchronised into the history tapes, the conversation-made-easy tapes, the confidence and wit tapes. He thought of the months of worrying about where the Shift would deposit him.

It was worth it.

For this.

Now he could make a passable attempt at reading and writing — not that it seemed of overriding importance; the level of academic competence required for the course he was following was almost within his reach. He had not only been able to fit into this society; he had become, by his lights, a success, athletically and socially. He was happy.

He was joined by Mona Vance, a short, plump, attractive girl, much of whose course overlapped with his own. Perhaps, he thought as she swung into step beside him, perhaps I'll even marry. Now, wouldn't that be something? Mr and Mrs Farm Boy! He glanced at the girl. Mrs Farm Boy? Why not? At first he had been awkward in her company. But no longer. She laughed with him,

listened to him as if he were worth listening to, teased him as if he were worth teasing. His feeling of contentment spread to his extremities and he smiled at his private thoughts.

Perhaps Mona! Perhaps soon!

continued over

Slow Harry — Campbell

Ahead of them some children ran and shouted, fought and screamed. Back into his mind was dragged the one cloud that could obscure his sunshine holiday. Children! He couldn't have children. It was the one part of his Farm Boy status that he'd brought with him. Zero Repro Rating. The operation had been so long ago that he'd forgotten even the memory of it. At first it hadn't unduly concerned him. But, as his circle of friends began to grow wider . . .

Mr and Mrs Mannl And no children! Would a woman settle for that?

"You were really superb today, Harry," said Mona, noticing his dejection and trying to lift him out of it.

"You watched?"

"Don't I always? I wouldn't miss seeing you run Kane into the ground for anything."

"Why do you say that?" She could see that he was genuinely puzzled. "I like Jim Kane. There's no envy or spite in him."

"Sorry, Harry. I didn't mean it to sound like that."

"But you did say it!"

"People often say things they don't mean. Just for something to say — or maybe to hide what they feel. Don't you ever do that?"

"Sometimes." But the answer was uncertain. He regarded her with interest for a few seconds, then shrugged. "So you watch me for purely negative reasons? You don't so much watch to see me win as to see others lose?"

Mona laughed. "You must know by now that I'm an entirely negative sort of person." She didn't want to be trapped into too committed an answer; neither did she wish to abandon him to the private universe he carried around with him, a moment ago he had seemed lost, out of step with her world, with ordinary, insignificant human behaviour. And now — was he making fun of her?

"My place, Mona? Will you . . .?" he asked abruptly, seeming startled at his own suggestion. "Will you come back with me for a drink?"

"A drink? On your schedule?"

"Coffee, Mona. I'll make you some coffee."

She gazed up at the man walking beside her, at the open question on his eager face, until she realised she was making him uncomfortable. "You don't ask many people back to your place, do you?"

"Girls?"

"No, I wasn't just thinking about girls. I mean anybody? People? Friends?"

He shook his head. "Will you come?"

"I'd love to, Harry. And we

can talk. There's a lot I'd like to talk to you about."

The Moderator

"A fool fooled by a fool!" With an effort the City Moderator raised his heavy eyebrows and his round eyes stared innocently at the Warden. "Well, what kind of fool would that fool be?"

The Warden squirmed under the deceptively placid stare and the inanely echoing rhetoric. "An unhappy one, sir?" he finally ventured.

"Bet your life on it, Warden." The Moderator paused, the politician in him playing for effect. "Well, perhaps not your life. But you can bet your job, and your perks, on it . . . and you can bet your precious Repro Rating on it."

"My Rating has nothing to do with it," protested the Warden. "That's determined by the MediComp. I've got a clean bill of health there. My offspring would be Normal, and the Computer knows it. You can't interfere with . . ."

The Moderator wrinkled his fat face and frowned disapprovingly. "Can't I?" he hissed. "Listen, Warden, with a little nudge from my office the Computer can be taught not to suffer fools gladly." The speech was precise, staccato; the Moderator had something to lose as well. If the Warden were seen to be a fool, then it would be recognised that the Moderator had tolerated a fool, and that particular monkey would squat heavily on the shoulders of any politician. "Despite the advances that we've made in Time Movement, it still took you two years to determine that your little Stupid wasn't hiding out in the early six-

tions that had stirred within him then. Some idealistic part of his being had been with Harry, had applauded his initiative and hoped he'd never be caught. No longer. The chase had worn him down, pressures from the authorities had quenched that tiny spark of rebellion. All he wanted was an end to the matter.

"I'll be going back myself," he told the Moderator, "probably within the next hour. Mossley's just running a last check through the records to see if there's any indication there of when he was recaptured."

"You have to do that?"

"Maybe not. But it ensures the least time distortion. Paradoxically, the time I choose to arrive will be dictated by the time itself — so, in a way, I don't really choose: it's already happened. I'll just be fulfilling a sort of prophecy — retrospectively, of course."

The Moderator didn't even pretend to follow the explanation. "I won't argue with your reasoning. These things become more complex the more one examines them. As long as you have him back today; this has dragged on long enough. However, Warden," the Moderator's tone changed, "if you think that's an end of the matter, you're sadly mistaken. As soon as you've recaptured him your Shift will be dismantled. I'm to inform you that your licence has been revoked. I'm sure you were expecting something like this?"

The warden nodded dumbly. Why fight it? He couldn't win.

"And next week," added the Moderator, "the Farm Commission will be sending a Field Team here."

The Warden stared at his superior in outraged surprise.

"If the Farms fall, the laws fall and, if the laws fall, the country falls."

teenth, or whatever time it was. God, two years crawling down the wrong tunnel! How he managed to do it to a clever man like yourself I'll never know. Two wasted, costly years! Then another year surveying the track back from it. And your troubles aren't over now that you've found him — if you have indeed found him."

"Oh, we've found him alright. No doubt about that. It's just a simple matter of going and digging him out." This morning, when his Chaperones had confirmed the extant documentary evidence, the Warden could feel nothing but relief. He remembered the day when Harry escaped, the conflict or emo-

"That isn't necessary. There'll be no more Shift. What's there to investigate?"

The Moderator drew a sheaf of papers to him and shuffled through them. "Discipline! They'll be investigating discipline. These reports show an alarming deterioration in standards since you took over. When I arrived here today there were Stupids wandering around all over the place, and some of your guards half asleep. Even the guard on the main gate forgot to salute me."

"He isn't paid to salute you. He's paid to look after the inmates. And I determine how that's done. All the Chaperones follow my instructions."

"That's it, Warden! Your instructions! The Field Team will be investigating you — not your guards, not your Stupids."

"'Chaperones', not 'guards,'" snarled the Warden, leaning angrily across the desk. "And the 'Stupids', as you constantly refer to them, are doing no harm wandering around. Why don't you cite some of the other reports? — on their individual development? on their personal relationships? on their athletic and artistic achievements? Oh, they haven't produced, and they won't produce, any great works, and I'm sure you'd find their poetry laughable and their artwork ridiculous and incomprehensible. But, by the standards of the Farms, the results we're getting here are good."

The Moderator heard the Warden out with a smile of tolerant patience. Then he bundled all the papers on the desk into a pile, slowly and theatrically shredded them, and swept the untidy heap onto the floor. This done, he leaned back in his chair, squirming his buttocks into a comfortable position. "Alright, Warden, let's forget the reports, and let's also forget your abysmal lack of manners, and let's look at a few political realities. First of all, I'm not really concerned what terms you use — 'guards' or 'Chaperones', 'Stupids' or 'poets'. If the terms you've picked make you feel morally superior to a corrupt politician like myself, then so be it. If you want to pretend you're one of the good guys, then I'm not going to stop you deluding yourself. Obviously you need to think of yourself as something more than a glorified jailer."

"Your conscience and how you decide to appear it are your affair. But your intelligence and your competence are mine. The reality — which you seem unable to accept — is that the overall level of intelligence has been generally increasing over the last fifty years or so. And some people have been left stranded."

"It's not necessarily intelligence you're talking about," stated the Warden. "The ability to handle certain classes of concepts has been augmented throughout society, mainly in response to specific needs for specific skills. The ability to conceptualise in the particular areas technology now requires of us is not the only criterion we use in identifying intelligence."

"Intellectual sludge!" retorted the other. "Don't hand me any of your academic babel. If your marks of intelligence need not refer to society, then society need not defer to them. Anyway that's a side issue: by any woolly

academic standards that you care to apply, these people are stupid. Alright, Warden, let's just say that they're not very bright and, what's more to the point, they couldn't fit in with the rest of us. If we released them, complete with their Zero Repro Ratings, then we'd be placing our whole system in jeopardy. Your heart can bleed for these characters while they're in here, but I'm not putting them on the streets to have society's heart bleed all over the Repro Laws."

That is indeed a substantial part of your motivation, realised the Warden. The Laws were your father's beast and you've been riding that beast all you're your political life.

"And the Repro Laws," continued the Moderator, "have given this country a prosperity thought impossible. They've ensured that we get maximum benefit from advances in genetics and in industrial technology. The government isn't going to throw all that away now."

"They wouldn't be throwing it away by allowing more freedom to the people on the Farms."

"Don't be a complete fool. The Laws are coming under attack from a number of quarters now. If the Farms fall, the Laws fall and, if the Laws fall, the country falls." he caught the look of amused cynicism that flitted across the Warden's features and readily amended his last statement. "Agreed, Warden, if the Repro Laws fall, it's me that'll fall with them — me, and a hell of a lot of my colleagues. I can see you're beginning to appreciate the political realities. Well, then you'll appreciate this: we aren't going to allow people like you to bring us down. Keep your heart soft and pliable, if that's what you want. But once your brain goes soft and you allow your overwrought conscience to make my life difficult, that's the day I'll step all over you."

He glared at the Warden, demanding a response. Finally the Warden dropped his eyes. "I think I understand, sir." He did understand: ratings, job, security — all could disappear overnight. The Shift was already marked for removal; his research was aborted. For what? For Harry? For childish idealism? Why fight it? He couldn't help Harry and the others. Nobody could.

"You'll cooperate with the Field Team?" The Warden, still unable to face him, half shrugged, half nodded. "Good! I'll take it that means yes. You're beginning to see sense. And if you see enough of it, maybe you'll make your own report on how discipline and security could be

tightened up on the Farm. A report like that from an experienced Warden like yourself would be of great benefit — to all of us. Maybe you could have it ready before next week. Maybe we'll find we don't need a Field Team. You might just discover — his voice was bosom buddy sweet, his eyes as innocent as ever — "that even politicians can be reasonable."

The Warden was saved the humiliation of digging himself deeper into the servile pit he found himself in by the entrance of Mossley. The Chaperone was carrying a single clip of microfilm.

But it's over now, Harry, You've got to come with me."

"Is that all you could find?" asked the Warden. "I thought there was more than that?" He knew there was more; he'd seen most of the evidence as it was collated.

"It's all we need." Mossley handed over the micro. "That gives the precise date we'll have to go back to."

The Warden slid the clip into his read out and the screen brightened. "TRACK STAR VANISHES!" ran the headline; and underneath a picture of Harry was the report: "On March 11th a promising young runner from the local college left the campus track, returned to his apartments, and has not been seen since . . ."

The Warden read the date again, checked the year at the top of the page, then withdrew the clip. He looked up and saw the Moderator watching him closely. He's wrong, he said to himself, and someday somebody will tell him. But it won't be me; there's nothing I can do.

"Don't worry, sir," said the Warden. "You can have your report — and you can have a tightly run Farm. And someday, I suppose, I'll join you in hell." He turned to Mossley and gave him the clip. "Let's not waste any more time. Set up the Shift for the date on this. I'll go through myself and bring him back."

Friends

Harry had half expected that the presence of Mona in his apartment would unsettle him. He'd be tongue-tied. He'd fumble with the coffee cups. He'd say something stupid . . . really Stupid, and any chance of the relationship developing would perish.

Mona too had been apprehensive. Would Harry's moody intensity return and wedge itself between them?

In the event their fears were not realised. Harry talked about

running, but in an uninvolved manner, keeping his accomplishments at a distance. Mona gave practical advice on some aspects of their course, offering him assistance with his essays. They agreed that they enjoyed each other's company, agreed that meeting as a twosome was more interesting than passing words and smiles through the company of others, agreed and agreed, and laughed each time they agreed.

They drank coffee which made them scowl, opened books which they didn't read and played records which they didn't listen to. And, as the afternoon

gradually shaded into a quiet twilight, they moved closer. Their minds were touching, their hands almost touching, when their lives began to sunder . . .

In the first instant of the phenomenon Mona saw divine intervention in the subtly shifting patterns of light. God-is-love? This feeling of vagrant bliss lasted less than a second, then was crushed by heart-kicking terror as the room began to tilt and throb crazily.

She almost screamed as the light refracted, split, spiralled. The furniture started running on the spot. The walls lost their opacity and Mona could see into the corridor, then, through that, into Kane's apartment where the big man stood, mouth open, frozen in his underpants and socks. Then Kane's bulk blurred and became part of the wider scene as the universe continued to melt, and a substanceless transparency invaded the environs of the whole campus. Serenading the dissolution was a whine, low pitched at first, then screaming into a shrill whistle before faltering and dropping, bringing the barriers of reality back into place.

Abruptly the scene became familiar. The piercing shriek died and four prosaic walls once again trapped Mona with Harry. The phenomenon had lasted almost ten seconds.

"Christ, what was that?" stammered Mona. "Harry, what was it?"

Harry knew, could have told her if his mouth weren't so slackly dry, if his insides would stop churning. He turned slowly around, trying to get a fix on the intruder. Mona saw the strong shoulders slump. Harry seemed defeated, empty. Something had gone out of him, had been taken out of him, by the distortion that had just occurred.

They both turned as the bedroom door opened. Standing

in the doorway was a man of medium height, sparse, neat, dressed in a one-piece uniform. Despite his trim appearance, he was curiously disjointed; his form seemed to flow within his frame and around him bristled a glowing aura like an advert for hot breakfast food. By the anger in his eyes when he looked at her, Mona suspected that he was surprised to find her in the room. He muttered something to himself, as if chiding himself for stupidity, then shrugged.

"Now what made me think you couldn't have visitors, Harry? I suppose it's because you always were a loner. And there was nothing in the newspaper report . . ." He hadn't finished the report. Silly of him. Perhaps the girl would say nothing. No, he realised, she would talk; she would just find it hard to make her audiences believe her. A man materialising out of nowhere, Miss? you must be mistaken! Still, he thought, Harry had done well for himself. "I'm glad to see you making friends, Harry."

"Harry?" implored Mona. "Harry, who is he? Where did he come from?"

No answer. A miserable, slack jawed apathy. Harry stared through her, lost in his own black universe, tears mingling with the cold sweat that glistened on his cheeks. She felt a hand on her arm, the newcomer gently urging her away.

"Let me talk to him, young lady," he whispered. "Perhaps if you were to leave . . ." He gestured towards the door. She allowed him to coax her across the room, but pulled away from him when he opened the door.

"Six months, Warden," muttered Harry. "Six months. It's not fair. I've only had six months."

The Warden saw Mona's defiant stance, decided not to waste time trying to evict her, and approached Harry. "I'm sorry," he said. "I really am. I'd like to leave you here, but it's no longer up to me. You deserve a chance for thinking up that idea with the spinning dial. It was very clever: we spent two years downtime from here, then another one going through the records. But it's over now, Harry. You've got to come with me."

"No." It was a sad, unassertive sound, as if there were no will behind it, as if Harry had accepted defeat but couldn't find the words to acknowledge it.

It was a curious tableau that Mona found herself watching. The tall, lean man who had earlier outpaced ten of the city's greatest milers stood with his head bowed and his shoulders

continued over

Slow Harry — Campbell

sagging. The other man, the uniformed Warden, was regarding him with a mixture of awkward impatience and professional sympathy, as if Harry were an erring child who had to be punished for behaving too grown up, too soon. The pulsing aura around the man was much diminished now.

Neither man seemed to hear the knocking at the apartment door or see McCracken and Kane as they entered. "Right, Harry," called the coach, "we're here. Let's talk business."

"Harry's not well," said Mona.

"Sure," said Kane, "I feel all shook up myself. Christ, that was some experience just now — like the world caving in. What the hell was it? Nobody seems to know." He peered at Harry. "Hey, Harry," he shouted, "shake you up a bit, did it?"

"Say, who's your friend?" asked the coach. He recognised that Harry looked more than a little shook up, and was beginning to suspect that this funny fella in the peculiar pyjamas might have something to do with his condition. "What's the matter, Harry?"

"Nothing," mumbled Harry.

"Nothing! Nothing? You look as if you've just discovered that your teddy bear's a heroin addict, and you tell me nothing's the matter?"

"I've to go away, that's all."

"That's all?" echoed the coach, incredulously. "For how long?"

Kane shuffled uncomfortably. McCracken's attitude to leave of absence during the season was well known: mothers and grannies were expected to die during the summer vacations. Kane tensed himself for a scene.

Harry cleared his throat. "I won't be back," he whispered hoarsely.

The coach turned threateningly on the Warden. "You, mister! You got anything to do with this?"

The Warden was still staring at Harry. He could take him by force, with little difficulty. In moments Harry could be back on the Farm, the Warden's own problems beginning to resolve themselves. What did he owe to a Stupid like Harry? An apology? What good would that do him? An explanation to Harry's friends? That would just complicate matters. But hadn't there been a time when he'd wanted to complicate things, to throw a handful of sand into the lubricating oil?

"Perhaps I'd better explain." He turned to face the others. "You probably won't believe me. Almost certainly nobody will believe you if you ever are so foolish as to spread the story

around. You'll be locked up and well looked after if you tell people you've met someone from another time."

"Is that what you intend to tell us?" asked McCracken, "that you're from another time?"

The Warden nodded. "Mister, you should be locked away."

"I didn't expect you to believe me, but I said you'd get an explanation and that's it; Harry and I are from your future. Harry found a way to escape into this time and I've come to take him back."

"But the way you talk, the way you're telling all this — you're reciting it. You don't believe it yourself."

The Warden sighed. "It doesn't matter what I think, I'm only doing my job. Harry's one of my responsibilities. He may seem fairly capable to you, but I can assure you there's no way he could become a productive member of our society. Believe me, compared to the rest of us, Harry is — well he's not very bright."

"I noticed he wasn't too hot at the reading and writing," said

at each other in amazement. Something was definitely wrong here. The coach may not have been able to assimilate all that this man had said, but he knew his racing flesh, the power of the athlete, could read a stop watch. Who was this bloody fool anyway, coming in here with his crazy talk? "Look here, mister —"

"Yes, I can see your difficulty, coach. But, as I've told you, the level of efficiency in our society has soared and, as well as that, standards in sport have always increased with the passage of time. You will be able to recall when breaking the four minute barrier for the mile was achieved. Yet, even in your own day, you've shaved almost ten seconds off the record. With improved training methods, feeding, streamlining and genetic control — plus early selection and specialisation — our athletes are capable of three twenty for the mile."

"It's not possible!"

"Of course it is. And Harry — well, he's only capable of three forty."

McCracken was in a daze. These were figures he thought he understood. Now he wasn't so sure. But he believed what he'd heard. He'd watched Harry; he knew there was a lot of running in the man, pace that hadn't been demonstrated. "Three forty! Christ, the fastest he's done for me was thirty five one for the mile." He turned on Harry. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Harry stared at him blankly. The Warden moved between the coach and his lost protege. "Come on, Harry. Let's go home."

"Piss off, mister," said the coach, angrily now. "Harry's best athlete this college has or is ever likely to have. As far as I can see, you want to take him back to some funny farm and —"

"He doesn't belong here. You, as a sporting man, can see that using him would be in contravention of the spirit of your rules."

"To hell with the rules," snorted McCracken. "The only thing I'm interested in is that you want to lock up this poor fella in some sort of future prison. He's not doing anybody any harm where he is. That's the way it's going to stay..."

"You can't stop me taking him, coach."

The coach suddenly made a wild lunge for Harry's enemy. He found little purchase on the unyielding skin of the uniform and switched his assault to the neck. The others did not clearly see the Warden's counter; neither did the coach. They saw the Warden twist and spin, then

"Our society is much more technologically complex than yours."

"Escape?" asked Mona. "You said 'escape'. Was Harry in prison?"

"No," answered the Warden, too quickly. Then he seemed to reconsider his answer. "No, not prison, but I suppose Harry felt he was unjustly confined. Our society is much more technologically complex than yours. For a start, all the dull, menial jobs are carried out by machine labour. So the tasks that are left for humans require a high level of competence and intelligence. Because of genetic engineering, because we can monitor and terminate most risky pregnancies, decide who will breed and who won't, when and how often, because of all these advances the levels of skill throughout our society have greatly increased."

"However, more than one per cent of our population is quite incapable of carrying out the simplest of the tasks left to humans — at least in such a way that we could leave them to get on with it without constant supervision. They are less efficient than machines at those jobs we have designated for machines — so we have a problem: our medical advances are phasing them out of existence, but what do we do with the ones who are still with us? They perform no useful function; many are discontented when they mingle with Normals; and many Normals feel — guilty, perhaps — yes, guilty when the Stupids are around them."

"So we set up Farms for them, where they can be with others of their own kind, where we could find something for them to do. So that normal, talented people wouldn't have to be constantly reminded of their existence, or of the Repro laws that govern everybody's life."

"Stupids?" Mona was stunned. "You mean Harry's stupid?"

"That's how he's classified."

McCracken. The coach had been quiet, as if hypnotised by the Warden's words. "Kane, here, he's practically illiterate as well, from what I've heard. He wouldn't be one of yours too?"

The Warden smiled and shook his head. Kane breathed a sigh of relief.

"Still," continued the coach, "that's no reason for barring them from College. After all, this is the place to learn that sort of thing."

"I don't wish to disagree with you, but I'm not talking about literacy. Most of the societies up-time from you will be almost completely illiterate. The audio and televisul media will replace your books and comics. Numeracy will also largely disappear. Even in your society the ability to recognise numbers is enough for the vast majority of people. Juggling with them can safely be left to electronic tills, pocket calculators and the like, and to those people who have made it into an esoteric skill. For us, literacy and numeracy are no mark of intelligence."

Kane beamed. Much of what the Warden had said was difficult to follow, but what he could understand mirrored his own ideas. Hadn't he often said as much himself? The coach, too, was inclined to nod his agreement.

The Warden turned and placed a hand on Harry's shoulder. "They seem nice people, Harry. Your sort of people. I'm sorry you can't stay." He opened the clasp on his belt to reveal a complicated array of miniature controls.

"Wait a minute, mister," interrupted the coach, as he saw his prize athlete begin to slip from his grasp. "You make out that Harry is totally useless. What about his running?"

"I'm afraid," said the Warden, "that even on the track Harry isn't very inspiring."

Kane and McCracken looked

deftly dance away to the other side of the room. They saw him thumb a stud on the clasp of his belt and, for the second time that day, the room swayed and spun, unmoving. The walls and furniture ebbed into transparency, then flowed back into a throbbing half-reality. The hum that had been heard earlier that day sang up the scales, then receded to a low, droning buzz.

The Warden floated a few feet from the floor, his substance visible but diminished, his form clouded by the aura that Mona had noticed on his first appearance. "I've created a local effect. It won't be experienced much beyond this room, but it will protect me from your rather quaint anger. I intend to do what I came to do.

Harry still appeared to be taking no notice of the world around him. Poor Harry, thought Mona, then immediately crushed the pity from her mind. The Harry she had known wouldn't need her pity. Who was this other Harry, foreign in time, that the Warden talked about? That Harry hadn't even been born. He's smaller than a foetus, unconceived.

She grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him. "Harry! Do something, Harry! An hour ago we were laughing. Don't you want to go on laughing?"

He looked up at her and she saw the first small stirrings of will begin to etch themselves on his features. "Of course I want to laugh," he said, "I want to stay here. But what can I do? They brought me back before. They'll do it again."

"That's right, Harry," said the Warden. "There's no escape. Not for any of us."

There's nothing you can do, Harry. The Warden thought back to his interview with the Moderator, remembered his sense of hopelessness there. *Some day someone will stand up to the Moderator; but it won't be me. I haven't got the courage.*

"You!" shouted Harry. "You keep saying you're sorry, keep pretending you'd like me to be happy. You say you don't like what you're doing — but you still do it. And you keep on doing it."

"I've no choice, Harry. What do you suggest I do?"

"I can't tell you. I'm supposed to be stupid. You're the clever one. If you really wanted to help me you'd think of a way."

There was silence. The Warden could apologise again, then apologetically take Harry back, and say sorry for the rest of his life. Or until he learned not to be sorry. Learned that none of it was his fault. The way the Moderator had learned. That nothing was ever anybody's fault.

"According to our records,"

he said finally, "you disappeared today. You attended no more classes, ran in no more races. There's even an article in the local paper about your disappearance. That's the way it's got to be. If you don't return today, then those records will be false — no, not false, they just won't exist. They'll never have been."

And the time around them would change, some of it would cease to be. I've seen the records; that would change: I wouldn't have seen them.

A part of my life would be erased!

He shuddered. How much of the future as he knew it would never have been? How much of his life?

Second Chance

"Don't be a complete fool," said Moderator Mann. "The Laws are coming under attack from a number of quarters now. If the Farms fall, the Laws fall and, if the Laws fall, the country falls." He caught the look of amused cynicism that flitted across the Warden's features. "Agreed, Warden, if the Laws fall, it's me that'll fall with them — me, and a hell of a lot of my colleagues. I can see you're beginning to appreciate the political realities. Well, then you'll appreciate this: we aren't

"You want to take him back to some funny farm."

"Let me stay, Warden," Harry almost pleaded.

"He won't," said Mona, bitterly. "He's going to take you back. He won't get himself into trouble. He's afraid of his superiors. He'll just talk and make excuses for himself — like he's doing now."

She feels contempt for me! For me! And her only a silly, stupid child! But if I don't bring him back, thought the Warden, then the Moderator could send Mossley back instead. He saw himself seated opposite the Moderator, agreeing to do as he was told, hating the Moderator for his removed manipulation, but hating himself even more.

Not if I stand up for myself!

But if I go back without Harry, then this time — this here and now, me in this room — probably won't have been. Any resolve I find, to do what I think right, won't have been found.

So, how do I know I'll stand up to the Moderator?

"What are you going to do?" Harry was looking at him expectantly. The others could read the indecision on the Warden's face and were waiting for an answer.

How do I know the scene up time won't be replayed? And I'll grovel again, and do the Moderator's bidding again. And come back. To this. To this not knowing. I could trap all of us in a cycle, in a little knot of time, where I keep coming back for Harry.

How can I tell what would happen?

I can't!

But one question, one solitary thought, was eating away at his indecision, was gradually tipping the balance against all his worries.

How many people are given a second chance?

The Warden came to a decision.

going to allow people like you to bring us down. Keep your heart soft and pliable, if that's what you want. But once your brain goes soft and you allow your overwrought conscience to make my life difficult, that's the day I'll step all over you."

He glared at the Warden, demanding a response. Finally the Warden lifted his gaze and stared back. He thought of his life, since coming to the Farm. He'd thought he could institute changes, could make conditions better for everyone here. Now it was all being eroded. The early enthusiasm, the idealism, where had they gone? Weren't they still somewhere within him, buried?

The man opposite sat impassively, fat and remote, concerned only for his own political neck, waiting for the answer that he knew he would get. The Warden was suddenly angry. *Why should I let myself be bullied by this time server? I'll give him his answer!*

"I think I understand, sir. I understand that you'll trample on me if I get in your way, and I'm supposed to trample on anybody who gets in my way — including the people on this Farm who are my charges. That's what you want, isn't it, sir?"

"You'll do as you're told!"

"I'll do what I should have done a long time ago — stand up for the people who are rejected by your Laws. As you say, there's opposition building up to the Laws; I don't think I'll be on my own. And we'll start with Harry. If his presence in the twentieth century has changed our times, then we're living in the framework of those changes now. I intend to leave him where he is."

The Moderator's face was purpling, his eyebrows gathering angrily above his narrowing eyes. But the explosion was

fore stalled by the entrance of Mossley. The Chaperone, obviously intimidated by the swelling resentment of the two men, looked anxiously from one to the other.

"Warden, I've . . ." He coughed noisily. "There's something wrong, I'm afraid . . ."

"What did you find?" asked the Warden.

"Well, sir, Harry went through to 1981." The Chaperone fumbled clumsily with the file he was carrying. "The records are sketchy, but it seems he's still there well into the twenty-first century — and possibly after that; we're still searching. Warden, according to this — he passed the file over to the Warden" — according to the records, we don't manage to retrieve Harry."

The Warden glanced at the file, then indicated the cover. "What's this?"

"His alias, sir. That's why we found it so difficult to track him in the twentieth century. He used an alias."

When Mossley was dismissed, the Moderator returned to the attack. "You can still go and get him."

"Despite the records? That wouldn't be wise."

"Because of the changes? I realise there'll be slight changes, if we go against the records. But I'm willing to take the chance. You aren't going to flaunt my authority."

"This is my Farm. Until you can get the support to dismiss me, I'm still in charge. Harry stays where he is."

The Warden tossed the file onto the desk in front of his superior. "Besides, Moderator Mann," he added, "there's something there that might make you reconsider your attitude to 'slight changes'. Take a look at the cover."

continued over



Paul Campbell, married, four children, teacher of English at a Belfast Secondary School and a part-time house husband, wrote "Slow Harry" as a 4,000-worder two years ago, decided it wasn't up to much and abandoned it. Came back to it in February of this year and expanded it to give the characters a bit more elbow room. The ISFA awarded it the Aisling Gael Trophy for 1981. His ambition is to be paid for the story.

A few years back, in a moment of weakness, I wrote a nonfiction book called *War in 2080: The Future of Military Technology* (David and Charles hardback 1979, Sphere paperback 1981) ... also known as *The Future of Killing People*. It begins with a brilliant discussion of killing people with clubs, and by the last chapters is merrily cracking planets and detonating suns as a route to killing more people. In between there are fascinating digressions on allied subjects, such as seriously wounding people. One editor protested that "war is a clean and glorious business where people can release built-up tensions that would otherwise be manifested in ugly violence and aggression at, say, football matches." That must have been when they were trying to sell it to the Children's Book Club and were editing the more violent bits — you'd read of a multimegaton nuclear attack consuming whole cities in this fiery hell of radiation, and then would come the line, "Of course the people who lived there were dreadfully upset by this."

And, though less upset, we dedicated SF readers are all bored to tears with nuclear holocaust; we demand future battlefields swarming with planet-busters and colliding black holes, and we'd rather skip the familiar nuclear exchange which can rule out all these exotic (leaving us with still more tedious details of how best to chisel your flints — not to mention talks to limit the fearful proliferation of the bow and arrow). The assumptions to make if we want to see SF superweapons are, first, that people will indeed go on building bigger and better weapons without necessarily using them. Sometimes they can't even test them: a handy pocket weapon which makes suns go nova should not be tried out in the back yard, even if you do have a high fence. Building and not using weapons is a familiar story; whether they're actually used depends on assumption two, that we don't run out of energy and fight over the world's dwindling stocks of coal, oil and Ever Ready batteries.

Back in reality, the idea behind laser defences is that an H-bomb is triggered by a fission explosion triggered by conventional explosive triggered by firing circuits ... smite these circuits with your laser and you too can disable an oncoming ICBM, easy as playing Space Invaders. Obviously laser defences have advantages — with your beam travelling at the speed of light, the target can't run very far between the moment you fire and the moment it gets zapped. Also you won't run out of ammo provided nobody unplugs you and the fuses don't blow. There are disadvantages too ... interceptors may be slow, but they aren't soaked up and scattered by the air in the manner of energy pulses. And the most promising battle lasers operate in the infra-red: by a fascinating coincidence, damp air absorbs radiation

GENOCIDE for Fun

with special enthusiasm in that part of the spectrum. Laser beams also waver about in the air for the same reason that stars twinkle (Charles Fort says this is because the sky is made of wobbly jelly: powerful lasers heat the air, changing its refractive index and producing a lens effect which automatically throws the beam out of focus). No wonder military technicians can often be found picking their noses with their toes and complaining that whoever drafted the laws of nature was some kind of god-dam pacifist. High-energy particle beams have much the same troubles: and if you use charged particles (protons, electrons) the beam bends several degrees in Earth's magnetic field before it ever arrives ... great as a Freudian symbol, less useful as a weapon. If you use uncharged particles they won't move at all, since without charge there's no way to accelerate them. One trick is to accelerate protons and neutralize them by hanging electrons round their necks just as they zoom off, which is how the American 'Sipapi' system was supposed to work. I gather that 'Sipapi' is an old American Indian word meaning neutral hydrogen beam weapon.

Thus, pursuing future genocides, I won't dwell on much-thumbed World War III. You know the scenario, starting with an international incident when someone pukes on Mrs Thatcher at an embassy party; a false blip on the early warning system; a demented general pushing the red button in a fit of depression after being rejected by Extro. The nuclear exchange begins and we zoom up Herman Kahn's escalation ladder like a rat up a drain, with ICBMs falling literally by the thousand. The basic missile/interceptor chessgame is largely old hat, but some weird ideas have come up for what they call 'terminal defence' of the actual missile launching silos. It takes a nuclear strike at ground level to knock out these hardened launch sites: Among suggested defences are 'nuclear rockpiles', whereby you let off your own bombs underground and fill the air with flying rubble to smash oncoming missiles out of the sky... My favourite terminal defence is the forest of tall steel spikes someone wanted around each silo. A ground level strike is needed; thus attacking missiles won't go off before ground level — and just before they arrive, they're impaled on these ruddy great spikes and disabled. More cunning still, the MX missiles were designed to chug up and down underground tunnels on railway tracks: the enemy wonders where in umpteen miles of tunnel the missile can be, until it bursts

from the ground where least expected. In the same way, cruise missiles could soon be driving forever up and down the M1 in the backs of plain vans...

In nuclear planning there's a standard strategic answer to any defence less than 100% effective. You simply build lots more missiles and saturate the defences. Clearly this only works if you have the money: I name no names, but there are approximately two nations against which it's not worth defending yourself. (Neither is Great Britain, which would have a job saturating the defences of Liechtenstein — even if we decided to fire both our missiles, one would be grounded by union disputes as to who lights the blue touch-paper.) However, the traditional World War III is losing popularity with the economists. Nobody really wants nuclear explosions; they're not efficient. One ICBM fireball represents enough energy release to kill everyone on Earth several hundred times over — if the energy were properly distributed, eg, a separate packet of kinetic energy being set to hurl a separate blunt instrument at each person. No, the up-and-coming nasties are the well known cruise missile and the more obscure *Fair/Air Explosive (FAE)* warhead. Cruise missiles are economy weapons which rumble off production lines like Japanese motorcycles, whilst ICBMs each take many patient months to produce, like British Leyland cars. The cruise missile's trick is a microcomputer which follows terrain maps with the fanaticism of a bloodhound or taxman, literally at hedge height if need be. A relatively small and simple jet (this missile needn't leave the atmosphere like the high, fast ICBMs) allows a few thousand miles of hopskip-and-jump, hiding behind woods or hills, avoiding known defences, until it explodes within 40 feet of the programmed target. A microcomputer even stupider than the average Perry Rhodan fan can handle all this plus enough evasion tactics to make ex-president Nixon look straightforward; and since cruise missiles are small and cheap you can saturate enemy defences without too large an overdraft.

The economy warhead to go with this cheapo missile is the FAE model, effectively a bomb several yards across squeezed into a smallish casing. The trick is to use a volatile explosive, and for reasons of national security I shan't tell you that it's ethylene oxide. This billows from the warhead in a large cloud and is ignited: the explosion builds up over this huge volume of gas and can approach the unfriendliness of some midget nuclear weapons. Meanwhile the aggressor sits at home mur-

Slow Harry — Campbell

The Moderator lifted the folder and his face became pale.

"His alias!" said the Warden. "Harry Mann". Do you know if your great grandfather was called Harry? Mann is not a common name."

"But Harry's a Stupid! He can't

have children!"

The Warden smiled. "Now, who's being a fool, Moderator? The operation was reversible, even back in the twentieth century. So go and check. See if there's a Stupid hiding among the branches of your family tree,

and when you come back, if you do come back, then I'll be waiting for you.

"I'll be ready for you — for you, and for your Repro Laws."

* * *

As the afternoon gradually

shaded into a quiet twilight, Harry and Mona moved closer together. And, with the twilight darkening towards a lover's moonlight, they touched....

When McCracken and Kane came knocking on Harry's door they received no answer.

Paul Campbell 1981

and Profit

David Langford

muring "How virtuous I am, I have used a mere conventional weapon." Of course victims might not realise this wasn't a nuclear blast, and one thing might lead to another, and before we know what we're back chipping those damn flints again.

Energy beams are next on the list, real SF weapons at last. The conventional SF viewpoint is given in this extract from the immortal story 'Sex Pirates of the Blood Asteroid' —

... Each of Nivek's countless ships and planetary installations discharged the full, awesome power of its primary projectors, the blazing beams of destruction combining into a hellish flare of incalculable incandescence against which no defence might prevail!

The arch-fiend Nivek snarled in rage. "Missed!"

A nearby galaxy was blasted out of existence, but...

No energy beams work well in air; in space we have power problems since, Arthur C. Clarke notwithstanding, it's a long way to run electric cables. Possibly vast shoals of solar-powered laser armed satellites could be stationed in space to hit ICBMs as they fly out of the atmosphere somewhere over the pole; possibly ICBMs will have been junked in favour of cruise missiles before lasers evolve this far. An even more doubtful laser development is that old SF standby, the laser handgun — the likeliest possibility being a hydrogen-fluorine chemical laser producing an intense infra-red beam. I see its mighty wielder carrying a large cylinder each of hydrogen and fluorine, plus something like a spacesuit to withstand the laser's deadly exhaust of hydrofluoric acid gas. The mind boggles. (Someone has patented a laser handgun; people keep patenting perpetual motion machines, too.) No, my favourite fictional handgun is much more workable; it's called the Denticar and it projects this super-magnetic induction pulse which causes the victim's fillings to glow white-hot.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

More exotic still: what of the X-ray laser without which no Larry Niven plot is complete? Well, lasers do their dirty work by amplifying a light pulse as it bounces between two mirrors; unfortunately X-rays have this nasty habit of going right through existing mirrors, or at best being absorbed in them. A linear X-ray laser of enormous length, i.e. miles? H'mm. Obviously Niven's lasers use his celebrated stasis field as the necessary perfect mirror — in which case we might as well scrap the puny electron energy-levels which produce light or X-rays, and go one better by fiddling the nuclear energy levels to produce a gamma-ray laser comparing with ordinary lasers rather as a hydrogen bomb compares with a V-2, or a science fiction convention with a Liberal Party conference. This is not a laser to use in surveying, unless you prefer large holes in your landmarks; one constructive use might be to build a 10⁹ megawatt gamma laser, point it at a star ten lightyears

away and (in theory) trigger a supernova. Motives for this are wholly peaceful and nice, it being the only way to mine the core of a sun and get it to fling out some heavy elements like uranium with which we can power another laser and mine the next sun along...

This brings me to spaceships, especially fast ones. However unsatisfactory relativistic ships are for travel (unless you're keen to keep your good looks while stay-at-home friends are becoming fertiliser), they're excellent weapons. Take a missile weighing 100 tons and travelling at around 99.99% of c, the speed of light. No need to include a warhead, since when it falls with uncanny precision on whoever you've aimed it at, the kinetic energy release will be around 220 million megatons. Compare this with the piffling few thousand megatons needed to arrange 90% depopulation of the USA or USSR. Of course the victim may have taken precautions like building a warning system out near the orbit of Pluto, which relays a radio message telling him to dig a hole and take cover. The message takes nearly five hours coming and, travelling at 0.9999c, your missile arrives about a fifth of a second later. Tee-hee.

But it's expensive to feed so much kinetic energy into a missile. Ask for 220 million megatons' worth of energy and the electricity board will smilingly send you a bill for some £10,000,000,000,000,000, even more than they charged me last quarter. Far better to find energy lying round for the taking, as lumps of antimatter for example — if I had a pound of antimatter here, the Langford-destroying explosion as I actually touched it would release enough energy to supply 10% of our missile's needs. This isn't worth the trouble, though, since appealing though it is to use the energy of matter/antimatter annihilation to hurl missiles at the enemy, it's still more appealing to present him or her with a flying chunk of antimatter rated at a snappy 1.2 megatons to the ounce. Chunks larger than a ton or so may be divided into three easy-to-use sizes: continent buster, atmosphere stripper and planet smasher. This is a long way from chipping flints.

One problem with antimatter — where is it? Woolworth's don't stock it. CERN in Geneva manufactures a few hundred antiprotons a day, perhaps, and we'd need over 10²⁷ of them to make a one-megaton antimatter bomb — production would take longer than the universe has to run. The alternative, it seems, is to find a dying black hole; this, they say, will throw out great quantities of matter and antimatter in equal proportions. Decide which is which before you reach for your butterfly net.

Actually it's dangerous to even mention black holes, since accepted notions in their physics rarely last longer than the time Larry Niven needs to fudge up a quick Hugo-winning story on the subject. Using them for faster-than-light travel is now out, for example — at the best you'll be put through a sort of

mincar en route, arriving in the form of highly disorganized gravity waves. (Like British Rail, only even more expensive.) As weapons, black holes are still interesting; even small ones will happily gobble planets if given time to work up an appetite. But if you've no hole to hand? You could shift the Moon into collision orbit, also expensive; you could try the traditional recourse of stopping Earth in its tracks (very expensive in energy terms). It's cheaper to shift Earth's orbit so it boils or freezes, and, oddly enough, cheaper still to smash Earth into tiny fragments. Yet more economically, our arch-fiend could be a Velikovsky fan who decides to stop Earth rotating; or he could plump for some relatively mild show of force such as blasting the outer mile or so of Earth's crust into space. By now the destructive energies involved have dropped to a mere few hundred megatons for every human being alive — bargain basement stuff. It would be still more economical to drop a one-megaton bomb on each square mile of Earth's surface... but I suspect that when the Tyrant of the Vegan Horde moves in, his evil cost-accountants will dissuade him from this. Alas, planet-smashing is fearfully uneconomical: you can't beat a few thousand really dirty, polluting fission weapons if you happen not to like humanity at large.

But let's forget caution for a moment. Imagine yourself a magolomaniac who wants to outdo the foats mentioned, to go one better than city-smashing, continent-busting planet-wrecking and blowing up suns. I suppose you could blow up an entire galaxy, so to speak, by long and patient use of the super gamma laser already mentioned — but can you hit the jackpot by wiping out the entire universe?

My recipe for universal ruin is adapted from Mrs Beeton's for vinaldo, and runs as follows. First you construct a number of small black holes, say by using the gamma laser to compress lumps of iron to minuta size. Now by today's theories, little black holes aren't black; quantum leakage takes place and energy pours out. Thus they'll behave like tiny suns as they merrily leak away; meanwhile you relax and toast crumpets in the emitted radiation. By and by they will waste away completely; but each hole contains a singularity, a point in space so unspeakable in its habits that even Philip Jose Farmer hasn't written fully and frankly about them. When the singularity's tucked away in a black hole, we can pretend it's not there; when it escapes all hell breaks loose. Among the minor predictions is the complete breakdown of the directional flow of time; past and future don't mean that much any more when a singularity's around; create enough and you can bring the universe to a chaotic end, scrambled like a William Burroughs novel.

After that, there's little more to say. The creation of new universes is outside the scope of this serious and scientific article, though I think one of John W. Campbell's editorials tells you how to do it with only three pieces of wire and a used battery. Then, having created a suitable planet and evolved life upon it, you can get down again to the serious business of chipping flints.

FLA



ME AND THE HEALER

A rutted red dirt road cuts clear through the scrub to the horizon. Grey phallic sausages dangle from the branches of a few gourd trees. Euphorbias rise here and there like enormous candelabra. The sun burns fiercely in a cloudless sky . . .

This is Africa. The African bush.

A solitary dung beetle is toiling its way across the murram road, up on its hind legs pushing its ball of treasured filth . . .

I **know** that beetle. I stopped somewhere on the road between Lungalunga and Kwale, twenty years ago, to watch it! When I was working in East Africa.

I know that this is a dream. And I'm awake. The dream has become 'lucid.'

I blink my eyes rapidly to tell Miss Noguchi this as she sits by my bedside in the lab, watching my sleeping face, whilst keeping an eye on the cathode screen of the encephalograph.

"If the afterlife is an endless dream," Dr. Richter has said to us; "if Heaven and Hell are dreams that we dream when we die, based on what we did in life, then obviously we should learn to direct our dreams the way *we* want them to go — while we still have the chance. Otherwise we may suffer Hell forever, hunted by our own beasts and demons, tormented by our guilts and hang-ups, burnt by unconsuming fire."

Dr. Richter would teach everyone how to dream creatively, in full awareness that we're dreaming, in full

control of the landscape and the events. He would teach us all how to reach Heaven, and remain there.

The murram road is red: the colour of lust. It is deeply rutted. So am I, too, in rut? Is my penis horny as I sleep naked in the lab, near to naked Angela, and Tony, and Sam, and Fox, and Max and Donna?

Angela! If I wish it, a waterhole will open in the dry bush. She will be bathing there. If I wish it. Or perhaps she will be waiting for me by an isolated thatched hut.

Her. Yet not her. She will be a creature conjured by my mind — what the people of the Middle Ages called a succubus, a spirit that mates with sleeping men. She will be randy, as she never is in life. Or at least obedient.

What stops me from summoning her? Is it shyness, at being observed in the act? At my body being watched by Noguchi? At being overheard by her?

Dr. Richter has taught us how to talk in our sleep, so that we can report back lucidly about the dream state to the observers in the lab. Yet his watchword is: "Do **exactly** what you want to do. I want to know if there are limits to our powers in the dream state. I want to know what they are."

No. My doubts spring from a different source. If Richter is right about the afterlife being composed of dreams, then shouldn't my dreams be 'responsible' ones? Shouldn't I use the dream power in a kindly, non-exploitative way? Otherwise . . .

by Ian Watson

Flame — Watson

But if I was a Mohammedan, then I would believe that Paradis was full of *hours* of voluptuous, seductive women, to take my pleasure with. Surely a Mohammedan can dream of *hours* and enjoy them in perfect safety? So why shouldn't I dream of Angela, and enjoy her exactly as I wish? Forever.

"Do exactly as you wish. . . ."

Yet on the other hand: "Thou shalt not exploit the creatures of thy mind . . ."

(But perhaps not tonight? Perhaps not yet?)

And, of course, this tension may spoil the dream entirely for me. Angela may change into a rotting corpse in my arms, or into my own mother, shocking me back into the ordinary, zombi-dreaming state. Or a lion may leap out — out of my mind — to maul me.

Yet it isn't the real Angela that I will thrust myself upon. The real Angela will be dreaming her own dream, behind her own screen in the big room where we all sleep for the experiment. *She* won't be hurt. Or offended.

The African sun beats down. The air hums. Cicadas thrash.

I decree a tiny, Rundi-style house of grass thatch, looking like a golden beehive. It stands alone in a small bush clearing fifty yards from the empty road.

Its reed door opens.

Angela stands there, wearing jeans and a tartan shirt. Now, that's a nuisance. / visualized her as wearing a loose Java-print cloth wrapped round her body, leaving her shoulders bare.

It doesn't matter. I'm still lucid. Still awake in the dream. I still rule it. Her clothes are a matter of fine tuning which somehow, because of some trick of my subconscious, I can't correct.

I skip down the track to her, whipped by a few thorns.

"I'm in Africa," I whisper to Noguchi, for the benefit of her tape recorder. "Alone in the bush with Angela. She isn't dressed the way I wanted. Everything else is under control. I created a thatched hut for us. There'll be a dry grass bed inside. The next bit's personal."

Gently, I pressed my Angela back into the African house.

Oddy, she resists.

"I'll be in your dream," she says, "if you'll let yourself be in mine." It sounds like a line from a Bob Dylan song, but it isn't quite. She smiles, teasing me.

"I am in your dream, Paul. This time I am, I've never been to Africa — it is Africa, isn't it? Couldn't we do some sightseeing?"

"Listen here, this is a lucid dream. It's my dream. My own. People can't share dreams." Why should I bother explaining — to my succubus?

"They can share dreams, when they're dead. If they dream lucidly."

"You're a *succubus*. A *hour*. Hell, why am I telling you? You're mine."

"Oh yes, it's your dream, all right — but I'm dressed as I please, or hadn't you noticed?"

This must be on account of the tension between guilt and pleasure. Id and Superego:

nothingness in it. You've got more scenery, Paul, and it's brighter."

My rage is rising. Why should I have to defend my dream — to her?

"Even if it's dry as dust, it's bright," she says.

I almost slap her. But instead, I decide to try a different tack. Perhaps I need to seduce my succubus, to satisfy myself.

state!

I'm still lucid, though. I still know I'm dreaming. But I can't wish the fire away. Because the fire is burning in *me*. There's only one way to quench that fire. And now it's too late for that.

"Get out of here!"

I drag her with me, she holding her open jeans together. No, I *shan't* let Angela vanish in the confusion.

Outside, the bush crackles with tongues of flame. Hand in hand, we run along the track to the road. The fire closes in behind us, leaping the path. Hastily I decree some clothes for myself: shorts and sandals and a bush shirt. Angela tides her own disarrayed shirt and jeans.

Flame creeps along both sides of the road now. Creeps? No, it *leaps*. Now it's racing through the scrub. A fire-wind is rising, fanning it. We start to run. Behind, flame joins hands across the road. We're running along a tunnel of fire.

Black smoke blocks our escape route. Solid smoke. It's like . . . a building in dark fog at night. A black wall, with a grey door in it.

"Into it!" cries Angela. "It's mine! We'll use it to escape. Come on!"

I don't want to go into that blackness. But I've little choice.

We dash through a door of smoke, into a dark, empty house that I don't know at all. There's no furniture. Steps lead down into a black cellar. Somehow I've entered her dream — but that's impossible.

Angela, the lovely and desirable, is this blankness and emptiness, and darkness inside you?

"What's down those steps, did you say?"

"I called the place down there Catatonia." She shrugs. "Sounds lovely, doesn't it? Like a sleepy little Italian town, where nothing moves during the siesta, not even a dog. And the siesta goes on and on forever. That was where I lived. Where I wanted to live. Not now, though."

Flames leap up the windows. Fire, from my own burning landscape, writhes up the outside of her walls. These begin to crisp and crackle, as though made of paper.

"The house is on fire!" "We'll have to shelter down in the cellar, Paul. Till the flames pass."

The cardboard rafters are beginning to char.

Firelight illuminates the cellar steps. As we descend these, the firelight flushes out the blackness, conquering it. And there's no dark pit in the centre of the cellar. The floor is firm.

Above, the house collapses in on itself, darkening us.

"Do exactly as you wish . . ."

that's it.

"I think I've come up against a 'limit,' Noguchi," I whisper. "I'm still in control of the scene. But the events are going wrong. Are you listening, Noguchi?"

"You listen, Paul. Listen clearly, for your own sake. The dreams you dream alone and unconsciously, when you're dead, are Hell. Hell is being locked up in your own unconscious dreams. It doesn't matter how many slaves or whores or victims you create. They'll get you in the end. They'll cheat you and torment you. But if you're lucid in your dreaming — if you're fully aware — you can share your dreams. That's Heaven."

"Are you trying to say you aren't a *hour*? Do you mean we're in telepathic contact or something, back there in the lab?"

"Telepathic contact in the lab? In the lab!" Angela laughs. "Dear me."

"She's being disobedient, Noguchi. Or maybe she's a part of my subconscious that's trying to tell me something about the dream world? Or even something about Dr. Richter's theory of the afterlife!"

"You can think of the afterlife as a honeycomb," Paul replies Angela, reacting (of course) to my question. "Separate cells, but the same honey: of the collective dream unconscious, gathered from the flowers of life. But the lucid dreamers leave their cells. Whereas the unconscious dreamers are all locked up. And their honey tastes bitter."

I decree us both naked. And, lo, next moment I am naked; but she isn't. I'll have to undress my *hour* by hand; but maybe that's part of the inner logic of this.

Angela looks around her, unperturbed by my sudden nudity.

"This dream's better than my old sick dream. Mine was of an empty house, with a dark and empty cellar and a hole at the bottom of the cellar, with

"Look, Angela, if a heavenly dream is a question of *sharing* things, will you kindly share yourself with me? Right now! Besides, if you really think you're in my dream, what a fine joke it'll be on them if we can make love here, while our bodies are lying a couple of metres apart! It's the last word in sexual mischief. Just imagine lying in bed with your spouse, and carrying on a genuine sexual affair in your dreams!"

"I don't want to."

"You won't, really. Your real body stays virgin pure." Hell, this is absurd. I'm treating her like a real person.

"Paul, I am the real Angela. This is my mind's body, here."

Oh God, it's the most realistic she's ever been in any dream. She tortures me.

So why should I let myself be frustrated?

No reason at all.

"Let's take a walk, instead. I want to explore, Paul. I want to show you something —"

"You do. Want to. I want you, To."

She shakes her head.

"That isn't the same thing."

"Yes it is."

I push her back into the thatched hut, so that we both end up sprawling on the grass bed.

"You can rape me, I suppose. You're stronger. Here. You're in charge of the scenery. I'm just in charge of me."

I unbutton her shirt and unzip her jeans. Damn it all, you can't 'rape' a succubus! Our flesh rubs hotly together on the bed of dry grass. Such sweet, inflamed friction!

What the hell's that I can smell?

It's *smoke*. I can smell smoke.

Fire! Bush fire, the fire that burns unconsumingly . . .

And suddenly the walls of the golden beehive burst into flames.

It's all a trick of my subconscious, designed to frustrate me — designed to frighten me back into the zombi dreaming

"Stay awake," orders Angela. "Stay lucid. That's very important. You're almost there..."

"Where?"

She doesn't answer me.

We wait.

And presently, a sudden wind whisks all the blackened paper away from overhead. At the top of the cellar steps is blue sky. Sunshine floods every crack and cranny.

The dark cellar has cracked open like a seed which only fire can germinate. Flame has consumed the empty house; the empty house has soaked up all the flame. I feel somehow... easier.

Angela grins at me.

"Now you're really in my dream, for good. In my later dream, let's go up and meet the others..."

"Others? What others?" A cloud passes over the sun; a chill breeze touches me.

"This isn't just my dream. Come along!" Nimble she runs up the steps to the surface, pulling me with her.

The land around the former house is flat, burnt black. Yet already seeds are sprouting. Seedlings are writhing up like green flames. In the distance stands fresh, open woodland. A river winds its way. On an island in the river rises a Germanic fairy castle, with flags fluttering gaily from the turrets. It reminds me of one of mad Ludwig of Bavaria's castles. It's smaller, though, and the river parts to flow around it like a moat.

My burnt patch of Africa is barely half an acre now. Healing it seals itself on to the other terrain, like tissue regenerating. The sun is bright but gentle, unlike the African sun. Pleasantly warm, not searing hot.

We set out for the river, and the castle.

"But how—?"

"You're dead, Paul. Don't you realize? You've been dead a while."

"Dead?"

"Of course you're dead! So am I. Welcome to Heaven. You've finally made it here."

"I don't understand..."

The ground we tread is turfed and mossy. The remaining blackness is rich loam, not ash.

"Dr. Richter was quite right. We're his graduates; you and me, and Sam and Tony and Fox."

And now I remember something else about the 'experiment'...

It wasn't an ordinary experiment at all. We weren't exactly volunteers. And it wasn't conducted in a lab; it was in a clinic.

"It was *therapy*, wasn't it? It was an experiment in therapy—for the," I falter, "for the mixed-up. For a bunch of nuts. It was psychiatric treatment. We...

Richter was trying to save us by teaching us how to dream lucidly. Using drugs and hypnotic tricks."

"Right. You and your sexual problems and your whole sick attitude to the world — as something dead and full of zombies. Me and my pyromania, my fire-raising —"

"You burnt my Africa down!"

She nods.

"— and my black depressions. Fire was the only thing bright enough to keep me from that dark and empty house. It was a choice of either burning places down, or sitting like a statue in that empty cellar. I swung between the two extremes: burn and freeze, freeze and burn. And Sam and Tony: all of us — we didn't look too salvagable in the real world, so —"

"— so, in our dreams Richter hoped . . . ?" I feel as if I'd been walking down that dirt road in dream-Africa for years on end. I'm still confused.

"What better way to treat the not-very-sane, than to show them how to control a whole world — of their dreams? What better motive could they be given, than to learn to rule a

Richter was right about the afterlife. My God, how right he was!"

"Wait a minute. How do you know about the plane? If we were all asleep?"

"Dr. Richter saw it, just before it hit. He heard its jets screaming. He had time to look out. He was awake."

"He made it here too?"

"Noguchi, as well. They went lucid straight away, as soon as they died. Because they knew how. I was lucid when I died. So was Sam. Fox and Tony went lucid too. But Donna and . . ." Angela purses her lips. "They weren't so far into this as us. It's tragic."

"Do you mean to say there are only seven souls in the whole of Heaven?"

"Oh no. There are thousands of us lucids. Mostly they like different scenery. We can all visit, though. Doors stand wide open to their dream-worlds. But billions of other dream-worlds are locked up tight. The dreamers aren't in control there. They can't wake up in their dreams. So the dreams rule them. They're in Hell."

"As I was? Till you reached me?"

"You were close to rescuing

another great door, inlaid with ivory. The ivory door is shut tight. A monk in brown robes stands meditating outside it, his face hidden by his cowl. Painted shields hang on the rest of the walls, and crossed swords and spears and axes — firearms too, both ancient and modern.

I think I know the reason for this armoury, without asking.

We are the knights — and ladies — of the dream unconscious, lucidly known, consciously mastered.

I point at the open door.

"That way leads to the other lucid dreams."

"And the ivory door?"

"All the lonely hells of dead souls are through there, Paul. Every now and then, that door also opens. A flash of lucidity passes through a hell-dream, like lightning. Then the door closes tight again. Unless one of us goes in, on a rescue mission. And it might never open up again, on that particular dead dreamer."

"So through there . . . ?" "There Be Dragons. Often. The dragons of the mind."

Suddenly Angela kisses me. It is a sisterly kiss, a kiss of welcome. I return it in the same way. Then she runs to Fox, and they embrace — in a different spirit.

Dr. Richter takes the chalice from Fox and, coming over, presses it into my hand.

"Hi Paul." He smiles wryly.

"One more down — ten billion more to go. And they're arriving all the time in Hell. But no devil is to blame. Just our own minds. The sleep of death is a troubled sleep, when we aren't awake in it. Still, I guess we have all eternity."

I raise the silver cup to him. "Here's to eternity, then."

I drain the liquid, and it is sweet.

At this moment the monk clasps his hands — for the ivory door is swinging open silently.

Beyond its threshold stretches a vile, dank swamp. A black man in rags is stumbling knee-deep through the foul waters, pulling a broken chain along with him. White riders on horseback pursue him with whips and rifles. Hounds swim and leap through the swamp. The sky is the colour of blood.

"No!" we can hear the slave scream distantly with the last of his breath. "I say no to you! You ain't real at all! You're just a nightmare! I'm dead — dead!"

Gathering up his skirts to wade, the monk steps quickly through into the stagnant waters, just as the runaway slave stumbles headlong.

The ivory gate strains to close, but it cannot.

Deathhunter

by Ian Watson

— Gollancz 1981

173pp £6.95

Ian Watson is a formidable SF writer, one of those few whose books genuinely are impressive as *intellectual* structures. The traditional commercial SF author swots up his physics, astronomy or (more rarely) biology in search of some new gimmick on which to hang a plot; Watson started with an impressive fistful of the soft sciences, and in his last few books has been working out in the wild blue yonder of metaphysics — where you're on your own, creating your own rules, and Higher Reality help you if they fail to make sense. "I am very interested in the Universe," said Peter Cook in *Beyond the Fringe*: "I am specializing in the Universe and all that surrounds it." The "all that surrounds it" has become a good part of Watson's science-fictional province.

Thus in *Miracle Visitors* he presented a theory of UFO phenomena as being genuinely "things that man was not meant to know" — leakage from a higher level of reality, which you can come to know only by losing humanity and moving out into said higher reality. In *God's*

World, probably Watson's most impressive performance to date, one crucial issue was that alien misuse of God (theological pollution? Well, almost) was causing all of our reality to gurgle down a metaphysical plughole. Then came *The Gardens of Delight*, where the exposition of an extremely complicated world-system occupied practically all the book, with alchemy, and Hieronymous Bosch's heaven and hell, and an outrageous miscegenation of black-hole theory with the ontological proof of God's, or Something's, existence...

Fear not, *Deathhunter* will come as a pleasing surprise to anyone afraid Watson is becoming ever more remote and erudite: without abandoning important themes, he's written an enjoyable and accessible book. The chunks of exposition are better integrated: critics of Watson's characterisation will find that in the present book, the ground has been craftily cut out from under their feet (you can almost hear the author chuckling). And this time, the aspect of metaphysics under scrutiny is one that simply has to interest everybody: the small question of what happens when we kick the bucket. Not that the book's as simple, or traditional as that might imply.

Deathhunter opens with a rapidly and often wittily sketched utopia, containing the expected hints of something rotten. The Good Life has resulted from the philosophy of the good death:

the creed is that after death there's nothing, that you vanish like a turned-off TV picture, that the proper end of life is calm acceptance of oblivion ("you should go gently into that good night"). Psychiatrists have become "death guides" leading the aged and sick into this approved frame of mind — without fear, without hope — before voluntary euthanasia. It is trumpeted that with fear of death abolished, war and other evils have vanished too; at the same time it's quietly made plain that little things like poetry and the creative arts in general have likewise bitten the dust. Even scientific research into the possibility of an afterlife is taboo, since the findings might shake the wobbly dogmas of the Houses of Death...

Enter the eponymous Jim Todhunter, a misfit death guide who falls into iconoclastic company and is duly corrupted by wrong thoughts. Suppose the only good death is a violent rather than a peaceful one — that something out there feeds on souls, and specifically those souls which fail to make a quick getaway? But if there is something, perhaps we can lay our hands on it; and the narrative accelerates towards the year's most memorable SF image (which succeeded even without a supporting plot, in Watson's short *Omni* story "A Cage For Death" earlier this year). Lured by synthetic corpse-sweat and recorded death-thoughts, Death itself is caught fluttering like a

great red bat or moth through an infinite enclosure of mirrors... and still there's more than half the book to come.

In fact, as always, there are dozens of cards up the Watson sleeve: a cure for cancer, journeys out of the body, glimpses into C.S. Lewis-like hells of one's own desires, "imagination space", a whisky-swilling angel who asks to be called Tulip, cosmic revelations which flip the universe inside out — and then again, and again. The closing chapters resolve certain inconsistencies (such as some strangely paranoid outbursts earlier in Todhunter's saga) which you'd swear the author had forgotten about; and just as one expects the book to topple with a dying fall into the old cop-out of, approximately, "suddenly he realised he had dreamt it all" — just then, there's a final shocker in the unsettling tradition of Philip K. Dick.

Things and events can't be dismissed as unreal, Watson seems to be saying, simply because they happen in "imagination space". Why, you might have to create your own afterlife by an act of imagination when the time comes — and if it's influenced by Watson's imaginings in *Deathhunter*, as well it might be, the afterlife will (to say the least) be very interesting. All of which sounds ponderous, perhaps. Be assured that the book is a thoroughly exciting metaphysical thriller, never obscure and always gripping. Recommended.

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EXTRO INTERVIEW:

IAN WATSON

TALKS TO DAVID LANGFORD

"British SF in the 1970s belonged to Ian Watson," says David Pingle of Foundation. "Watson may not be the best writer in British science fiction, but he is probably the best thinker," enthuses Peter Nicholls of *Encyclopaedia of SF* fame. "There is no other writer in the field who provides such a bold challenge to the imagination," insists Brian Stableford. It was with fear and trembling that Extro girded itself for this interview...

Ian Watson was born in North Shields in 1943, and twenty years later escaped our educational system with a degree in English from Balliol, Oxford. Subsequently he lectured on English in Tanzania (1965-7), meeting his most terrifying challenge teaching Future Studies at Birmingham Polytechnic (1970-6). Since then he's been a full-time author, though his career began in 1969 when his short SF story "Roof Garden Under Saturn" was published in *New Worlds* and his educational book *Japan: A Cat's Eye View* in Osaka. Fame and power came with his first SF novel *The Embedding* (1973), a runner-up for the John W. Campbell Memorial Award and Nebula finalist. Its French translation *L'Enchâssement* won the 1975 Prix Apollo. Then came *The Jonah Kit* (1975), whose paperback won the 1978 British SF Association (BSFA) award; *The Woman Factory*, a collaboration with his wife Judy though not their daughter Jessica (published only in French translation as *Orgasmachine*, 1976 — but see below); *The Martian Inca and Alien Embassy* (1977); *Miracle Visitors* (1978); *The Very Slow Time Machine* (1979) — the title story of this, his only collection to date, reached the final Hugo ballot; *God's World* (1978); *The Gardens of Delight* (1980); and *Under Heaven's Bridge*, with Michael Bishop (1981). His latest novel is *Deathhunter* (Gollancz, 1981). Also there are two Watson-edited SF anthologies:

Pictures at an Exhibition (Greystoke Mobray, 1981) and — co-edited with Michael Bishop — *Changes* (1982).

Ian Watson was British Guest of Honour at the 1981 British National SF convention (where his short "The World SF Convention of 2080" was a runner-up for the BSFA award), and is Features Editor of the respected critical magazine *Foundation*, British representative of the SF Writers of America, deviser of the forthcoming Channel 4 TV series *Mindprobe* (to which he's also contributing the first and other scripts), and active in local (Labour) politics. He lives in Moreton Pinkney, Northamptonshire, and talks very fast.

Your intrepid reporter approached Ian Watson at work, crouching 1,000 feet beneath Moreton Pinkney in the deep structure of the semantic mine where this skilled artisan hacks out his novels in an atmosphere of sweat and toil. Still weary from a long shift wielding his meta-cleaver at the reality interface, he brushed loose concepts from his soiled coverall before squatting to share a traditional chip butty with me. The typically proletarian surroundings suggested an obvious first question:

EXTRO: In his book of interviews, *Dream Makers*, Charles Platt describes you as an Oxford academic. I gather you objected rather forcibly to this? Indeed, within hours of his visiting you, you and Judy and Jessica quit Oxford forever, for the fair village of Moreton Pinkney until miles away.

WATSON: Charles was unloading his own hang-ups about Oxford and Cambridge onto my head. His hang-ups were about the "horrors of academia". The reason why we ended up hating Oxford was because of the privileged frivolity of the place, its narcissism and power, and its brain-twisting grip upon the arteries of British life and thought. The only reason I would like to go back to Oxford

is to demolish those colleges stone by stone and distribute the building materials around the land. Apart from their intellectually numbing effect, and their social hegemony, the Oxford colleges came out in their true colours as rich exploiters towards the end of our stay. Which is why Judy and I were both arrested for criminal damage, shortly before Charles called.

EXTRO: Eh! You were arrested?

I mean, I blew up a pillar box as

one of many merry japes at Oxford, but . . .

WATSON: I don't know if you know this, but in that pillar box was the first letter I ever wrote to John Brunner. Only the charred fragments of the envelope were left; but the post office delivered them to John, and he sent them back to me. When I opened the envelope and burnt scraps of my own letter to him fell out, I thought, "My God, I've really offended him!" You nearly ruined a beautiful friendship with John Brunner.

EXTRO: I grovel utterly. But why were you arrested?

WATSON: The Oxford colleges are huge landlords. (You can walk all the way from Oxford to Hyde Park, or down to Southampton docks, without ever leaving Oxford-owned soil.) The property boom was on at the time, and St. J---'s college went crazy with greed because of the rise in central city house prices. The pressure was really on for the old tenants to get out — even if the houses just stood empty, while they coasted upward in value. The old street community was being wrecked, and replaced by rich middle-class property owners — which hardly helped the students or the academics of Oxford, whom the colleges nominally ought to have cared about. "Dons" were being forced to take out punitive mortgages in their middle years. A highly-regarded Professor next door to us was squeezed far out into the suburbs, while all the house and garden vanished into

the coffers of his own college.

In this way, the house next door to us got sold — to a small-time exploiter, who packed it with rowdies who kept people awake night after night, while he was living somewhere else. He also hired in people to bang and thump after working hours, "improving his property". Our whole end of the street was going mad with the unceasing disturbances. The surrounding ten households signed a petition to the owner calling on him to stop wrecking their living and working conditions. There were complaints to the Public Health, etcetera. Without result. I was losing sleep. I couldn't think to write.

A 84-year-old, one-eyed woman living over the road hobbledd across one night waving her walking stick, threatening to push in a window, she was so distraught. We deterred her, and . . . we did it for her. When the row started up one evening after daughter Jessie had gone to bed, and we were eating supper, we said "Okay, that's it," and in a co-ordinated 45-second operation Judy and I took out all his windows, front and back, with bricks and a hammer; and went back to get on with our supper.

EXTRO: That reminds me . . . have you another chip butty?

WATSON: Thanks . . . Soon police boots were pounding around the block, hunting the assailants. And eventually a couple of passing police knocked on our door, and said, "Do you happen to know anything about . . .?"

"Yes, we did it," said Judy and I.

The policeman staggered back, amazed.

"Then . . . then . . ." he gasped, "I arrest you for criminal damage."

So off we were hauled to the cop shop, and Jessie too, pulled out of bed by a sudden infusion of policemen, and even her Rupert Bear.

We explained what had been going on, and they said they'd

Ian Watson

lock us up for the night unless we promised not to go back and do it again. Judy refused, but I pointed out that since all the windows were already broken, we couldn't possibly do it again. So they phoned for a taxi for us.

Presently the case came up in court. We hadn't been in a court before, so we sat in on the previous case to observe procedure, then I defended us. We were let off with no fine and no court costs, and the police prosecuting officer came over afterwards and said, "I should like to congratulate you on your lucid presentation of the evidence, and, what's more, on having done the deed in the first place." But we did have to refund the damage. So I claimed it from the Inland Revenue as a tax-deductible business expense, since the disturbance had been interfering with work and lowering my income; and I had taken action to defend my business. While pointing out that there are grounds in law for disallowing this sort of thing, the Revenue agreed to accept it this time.

But Oxford was poison city now, because what had happened had direct economic roots in the behaviour of the colleges. What had always been latent, in happier times, now became manifest. When we left, the street was like a row of gaping teeth, about to be crowned with gold. It's educational, becoming a criminal. Immediately, one joins the majority of the population.

EXTRO: I know, I know. Later on, they got me for blowing up my college . . . But if we could diverge wildly, onto the subject of writing? Let's try a few of the traditional questions — like, why do you write, and why write SF? **WATSON:** I reach a larger audience than by talking to people individually. So I can disseminate ideas more widely. In the past, maybe I would have been a travelling preacher, or a peripatetic philosopher.

Why SF? Because it's a thinking literature. (Or at least it can be.)

EXTRO: By "a thinking literature" do you imply that (as an "ideas" man) you find complex ideas can be put over without so much gift-wrapping, so many concealing layers of metaphor, as would be necessary outside SF?

WATSON: To answer with a metaphor: at the Annual Horticultural Show in Moreton Pinkney this year, one of the table flower arrangements was censured for having the "mechanics showing", if you squinted closely enough. I don't agree with this way of judging flower arrangements.

EXTRO: Your fans will all be aware that at that very show, you were awarded the Winifred Jackson Memorial Perpetual Challenge Cup for the Best Front Flower Garden: yet another coming amendment to your *Encyclopaedia of SF* entry! But, SF . . . actually your first book Japan: *A Cat's Eye View* wasn't SF, was it? I also had the impression you'd written some odd things to keep the er, throat from the door — when we first met in the early 70s, you remarked with a curled lip that a certain Priest who shall remain nameless had written soft-porn potboilers, but aristocratic Watson wouldn't lower himself to write less than hard porn.

WATSON: I didn't write *A Cat's Eye View* to keep the wolf from the door. I was being well-paid by the Japanese Ministry of Education at the time. The project was suggested by a Japanese educational publisher. Their Government had actually paid (!) to fly our tabby cat out to Tokyo with us — and a Japanese classic of daily life in the Meiji Era (just after Japan was forcibly opened to the West) is I am a Cat, by Natsume Soseki: contemporary life seen through a cat's eyes. So I decided to write a 1960s version of Tokyo life,

seen through a British cat's eyes. The book has gone on selling ever since.

I wrote another one for the same publisher in 1977: *Japan Tomorrow* — an SF storybook for the same high school market, about alternative futures for Japan.

EXTRO: Now let's hear the bit our readers are waiting for.

WATSON: Hard Porn, ah . . . In a toyshop in Tokyo called Kid-dyland, which catered to the American army, we picked up almost all of the innovative Essex House novels — innovative in the sense that they were an attempt to produce speculative, intelligent, artistic, satirical, socially critical pornography. (So of course the series was squashed, as soon as the controlling company realised what was going on — subversion through sex.) This was pornography as attack, not as wank-fantasy. As is my *The Woman Factory*, a novel of woman's liberation. A contract is being signed right now, with Playboy Paperbacks, for a new and improved edition, with a totally rewritten storyline. In the retrospect of 10 years, the book could do with rewriting. This will be the first English language edition.

And if I might say so, *The Woman Factory* is one of the reasons why I don't have a literary agent. Arriving back in the UK, and believing that all real writers have agents, though knowing that this novel was a dead cert for Olympia Press, I got an agent (who shall be nameless) to market it. (He did, incidentally, occupy the floor beneath Olympia Press, in Soho.) About a year later when I wanted to know what had happened, he revealed that he had submitted it unsuccessfully . . . well, not exactly to the Society for the Propagation of Christian knowledge and to Oxford University Press, but almost. Had he popped upstairs with it, to Olympia? Not likely. So I sent

the book myself to Olympia, they said "Great!" and zoomed it straight over to the New York office — and a couple of weeks later we saw a newspaper article about how Olympia Press had just gone bankrupt.

Your remark about my aristocratic men is interesting, since this can only be a product of inner grace. The only aristocrats I resemble are Swinburne and Toulouse-Lautrec, both of whom were dwarfs. (As am I, due to my Northern working-class origin.) *A la lanterne, les aristos!*

EXTRO: Turning again, with an immense effort, back to SF . . . One of the impressive things about your first novel *The Embedding* is the display of expertise in numerous areas — the traditional spaceflight and alien contact, yes, but also politics and anthropology and underdeveloped countries and, especially, linguistics. Was all this part of your existing intellectual furniture, or was some swotted up for the novel?

WATSON: The politics "began" after I left the gilded pleasureland of Oxford University life for the socialist Republic of Tanzania. The possibility of writing something meaningful began then too — since my greatest dream in Oxford as a student had been to write decadent beautiful prose: a mixture of Beardsley, Huysmans, Walter Pater and Ronald Firbank — though the necessity of writing SF only became fully apparent when we got to Japan. I began writing SF, deep in future shock at the Japanese 21st century landscape of high-tech toys and eco-horror, as a survival mechanism. The anthropology and linguistics came largely when I was teaching future studies back in Birmingham, in the company of a psychologist and semiotics fellow, and a social anthropologist. I was self-taught, since Oxford didn't teach me any language theory, but on-

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Interview

ly Lit. Crit. and the history of sound changes from Anglo-Saxon onwards, and how to translate Middle English texts about nuns' underwear. **The Embedding** grew out of my own discovery of the "soft" sciences at the time, plus the political impetus of having lived in a developing country in the third world. . .

EXTRo: So that's what you brought from outside the SF genre: what about influences from inside, if any?

WATSON: While I was lying about on Oxford lawns reading Ernest Dowson with one hand, with the other I was schizophrenically clutching van Vogt. But SF seemed a bit like masturbation, a furtive pleasure which must be kept secret. I only got my head together about SF in Tokyo, where it was a tool for survival — though I had been reading the genre since I was eleven or twelve. I tend to have been influenced by the genre as a whole, rather than by a short list of books and authors.

EXTRo: But if you had to draw up a shortlist of authors you admire . . . ?

WATSON: As of now: Michael Bishop, Barrington Bayley, Philip Dick (middle period), John Brunner, for example. My very favourite book is David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*, and indeed I wanted (and it's still my ambition) to write the sequel to this. I wrote two chapters of the sequel, but Gollancz deterred me from continuing — and they own the copyright. To me, my chapters seemed like Lindsay reborn; though not, alas, to Gollancz. I was told that my idea of Lindsay wasn't their idea of Lindsay. Lindsay is atmospheric; I am philosophical, said they. Actually, this shows a thorough misunderstanding of Lindsay; and as far as I'm concerned, what I wrote is still Lindsay Reborn. This is a project that I will take up again one day, such as when *Arcturus* goes into public domain in about 1990. . .

EXTRo: Watson and Lindsay . . . the mind boggies. But this yoking together of wildly different elements is familiar from your early novels. We've mentioned *The Embedding*; in *The Jonah Kit* there's whale communication plus mind transfer plus extremely far-out cosmology; and of course the unlikely connection shows up right in the title of *The Martian Inca*. Any profound comments?

WATSON: It wasn't a deliberate trick. It's just the way I think. Possibly, as regards narrative interweaving, I was influenced by Graham Greene; possibly, by the structure of Wagner's music dramas with their leitmotifs. I read a lot of Greene, and listened to a lot of Wagner, once.

EXTRo: Let's have a look at the Themes of your work to date, your Message for Mankind, all that stuff. The obvious theme is the examination of reality, starting with mere different ways of looking at it in the earlier books, through a kind of transition period in *Alien Embassy* (various official realities for various levels of enlightenment), to the sequence starting with *Miracle Visitors* where the ground gets treacherous underfoot and objective reality becomes more and more dubious. In *Visitors* people can't grasp the "higher reality" of strange phenomena like UFOs without becoming part of it and thus strange, non-objective phenomena themselves. Later, in *God's World* and *Gardens of Delight*, whole realities have to be created from scratch by an act of imagination before they can be explored. . . I remember you saying those last two were essentially mirror images of each other because — but you put these things much more beautifully than I could hope to.

WATSON: You're right about the "transition period" in my books, though I myself would tend to say that *Miracle Visitors* marks the transition. The books up to then had been about the nature of reality, consciousness and perception, yes, but they were in a sense "innocent" books. They proceeded quite spontaneously (albeit plotted in advance). I, the author, was safely outside the reality problems confronting the characters. By which I mean that I was involved in my characters' destinies, but my own destiny wasn't in danger. Whereas in *Miracle Visitors* (which the themes of the earlier books led to) I myself was embroiled, as author, in the problem of "the reality of reality". And if I hadn't solved it, by completing the book, I feared that I wouldn't be able to write anything honestly again. In a sense, this is a problem that confronts any author who begins to worry about the nature of the reality that he or she is creating in a book. One answer is to begin writing "meta-texts"; fiction about fiction, meta-literature. But in my case the problem of the reality, and applicability, of the universe itself. So, as you say, in *GW* and *The Gardens of Delight*, the whole caboodle has to be created from scratch — hauled up by its own bootstraps. (Just as physical existence itself is hauled up, perhaps, by its own bootstraps.) *GW* and *Gardens* are mirror images in the sense that, in the former, the journey to an objective alien world is presented as a journey through imaginative space, the physical starship journey being also a

journey through the imagination — whereas, in the latter, the creators (who are also the inhabitants) of the alien Bosch-world have to imagine (and create) a human starship arriving there, in order to understand their own reality.

EXTRo: The "transition period" also seems to mark a division between books dealing with social and political reality, and later ones where this emphasis vanishes in favour of metaphysics — more and more abstract . . .

WATSON: This isn't really true, because the books form an evolutionary sequence (or at least I hope so!). It would have been quite possible to dish up another third world/consciousness novel — but this would have been just repetition; it wouldn't have been an honest exploration of the themes inherent in the earlier books. It would have been the mere production of a "politically correct" commodity. By taking my themes off Earth for a while, into the outer space "laboratory", I've worked my way round ("by commodius vicus of recirculation", as James Joyce put it) back to the triple theme of the nature of reality, power and its misuse, and utopia/dystopia, in *Death-hunter*. Also, the flip-side of political commitment and criticism of abuses is, in fact, the yearning for Utopia. (Politics may be the art of the possible, but Socialism is at heart the striving for utopia.) Insofar as *GW* and *Gardens* represent two very different, and not necessarily trustworthy, utopias, they are part of the earlier progression, the search for the earthly paradise.

EXTRo: Those two in particular also contain fairly complicated expositions of "God" and the universe, which take up a good many words. Do you think this is why some critics accuse you of being arid, or simply lecturing?

WATSON: Well, I've been accused of that — but on the other hand I've also been praised for precisely the opposite. I think it all depends on the level of ambition of the reader, or critic. There's also such a thing as fixed ideas among critics and reviewers. For example, in a *Thrust* interview with J. G. Ballard, when they happen to discuss my books in passing . . . now, where is it?

(He searches through his tool kit, tossing thanatoscopes and eschatometers out onto the ground.)

Oh yes, here we are. The interviewer says to Ballard: "So you're still, to put it crudely, an 'ideas' man rather than a 'style' man? Some people have faulted

Watson as a literary stylist." And Ballard answers, in puzzlement: "He's got a good style, hasn't he? He's a good descriptive writer . . . He can set a scene. I think he's got a good style . . ." The point being, that Jim Ballard didn't know till then that I was supposed to have an "arid" style, or lack of it. He'd just been reading the book themselves. No one had told him. No one had injected this bit of critical colouring into his appreciation. So maybe it isn't true at all.

EXTRo: But how does a "fashionable" judgement like that become fashionable?

WATSON: Well, I've spoken out in favour of "ideas-fiction", and have written several polemical essays about SF as a "didactic" literature: it's assumed that I'm simply making a virtue of my own "faults", and it's assumed furthermore that my characters must be different from the warm, breathing persons one is conned into accepting into one's bosom, elsewhere. People associate ideas with dryness, and oppose this in a simple binary way to warm human emotion, characterisation, well-crafted style. This is as simple-minded as a traffic light switching from red to green.

EXTRo: I'd wondered about a connection between the considerable ambition and complexity of *God's World*, and what I'd heard about its taking a long time to sell in paperback.

WATSON: *GW* sold British paperback rights very quickly, for the highest advance to date, or since. (The recession started shortly afterwards.) It didn't sell at all in America. No doubt one of the reasons for that is that *GW* is a somewhat up-market book. But I was also messed around incredibly for ages by a certain Big Name Editor over there; and if a novel hasn't sold after a while in America, there's a certain tendency to regard it as having gone stale or sour. Like yesterday's doughnut.

EXTRo: Is *GW* your favourite book; have you a favourite book amongst your own? Also, though here it may be Fifth Amendment time, I wonder whether you have a least favourite Watson book . . .

WATSON: Which is my favourite finger? Which is my least favourite? I would rather rephrase this: which book am I most emotionally connected with, still? (Though even this is false, as it suggests that I have divorced myself from the others.) But . . . well, *Miracle Visitors* was the most dangerous book to write. Not merely because UFOs started manifesting themselves closer and closer to Oxford, as though they were honing in on me, but because of what I said earlier.

Ian Watson

My least favourite book is a pretentious novel I wrote in Oxford as a student, called *The Infant Gladiator*. It strove mightily for effect, but I was merely writing. (Oscar Wilde, to his Aunt: "My dear, one doesn't write **about** things. One merely writes.")

EXTR0: Chris Priest and you have had rousing arguments on approaches to SF: to summarise with all my characteristic crudity, it seemed to be Watson the Didactic vs. Priest the Aesthetic. "Neither precedes the other, but aesthetics, rendered sufficiently high, can trounce didacticism any time!" said Chris in *Foundation 10*. Now, five years after that stage of the debate, how do the positions look to you?

WATSON: Well, we did start that off, as co-editors at the time, to get a rousing debate going. The Didactic versus Aesthetic business really concealed an underlying political bias, which came to the fore when my dear, misguided mate Chris proclaimed at the Leeds convention, during the debate on whether SF should support causes, that Britain is an occupied country (occupied by America) and that we couldn't, and shouldn't, try to do anything to change this, even if we all get blasted into

radioactive dust as a result. This is the bankruptcy of the supposedly autonomous aesthetic stance. No wonder he likes the band *Status Quo*!

EXTR0: Ouch. I hope that's just a snide comment on poor old Chris rather than a suggestion that didactic writers such as the later Heinlein stand to the left of the mere aesthetes . . .

WATSON: You've got me there, squire. Cunning devil, aren't you?

EXTR0: No comment. A word more on actual writing, now — your settings, for example. Although you've got a nice line in Third World locales, I'm surprised we don't see more use of your experiences of science-fictional Tokyo?

WATSON: I have used Japan a fair bit, in *The Jonah Kit* and then in *Under Heaven's Bridge* with Mike Bishop. But I don't really write autobiography, you see, I'd just as soon steep myself in a country I've never been to, and then invent it. "Imagination is not memory," said William Blake; and if we can't invent unvisited countries on our own globe, say I, then how on Earth are we going to invent alien planets?

EXTR0: Let me have a tiny pinch of salt for my chip butty

before I ask about Watson Characters . . . The *Encyclopaedia of SF*, here a mere mouthpiece of Peter Nicholls, would have it that your characters are mostly afflicted with anomie to the point where they become indistinguishable. How do you plead?

WATSON: Actually, most people are indistinguishable from each other, most of the time. They are in a ground state, and tend to collapse back constantly into the ground state, from their brief moments of high existence. Constant high existence, and wildly differentiated individuality, is a consoling artistic fiction . . . of novels, films, plays. A theme of my books is the self-reprogramming of human consciousness, to escape from this ground state.

EXTR0: Speaking of differentiated individuality, I must say that literary collaboration has fascinated me ever since I first shared a bottle of plonk: how did the Bishop/Watson novel *Under Heaven's Bridge* come about? The aliens in it are pure Bishop (from *Catacomb Years* and *A Little Knowledge*); their cybernetic God is pure Watson. I had visions of it starting with a phone call: "Hey, Ian, can you do me some metaphysics?" or

"Hey, Mike, can I borrow some aliens till next Thursday?"

WATSON: I was fascinated by Mike's alien *Cygnians* in *CY* and *ALK* and wrote — we write to each other frequently — asking if he was going to do a story set on their home world, since they certainly deserved it. He said he wasn't planning such, but why didn't I do it, or why didn't we both do it together?

So I nipped out and did some research on 61 Cygni (separation of the binary stars, spectral classes, etc.) and discovered to my dismay that we couldn't use 61 Cygni after all. So I invented the Gemini system instead, and wrote sections of the tale (which was going to be a novella at this stage) and mailed them to Mike. Looking at the sections I wrote, in retrospect, it doesn't really seem to me as though I wrote them at all — as I was doing my best to think in Bishophes at the time. I'd say we can both do that for each other. Though we've never met, or even spoken on the phone, we can become a two-headed entity; so it isn't all that easy to dissect out who did what.

Anyway, Mike expanded what I'd written, altering and mutating it; and I added in extra chapters (such as the Prologue,

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Interview

or Chapter 20 for example, where the Kybers try to scale the platform to escape; Mike thought this had surfaced from my unconscious memory of news footage of the last US troops scrambling for the last helicopter out of Saigon, and I think he might have been right. I arrived at the 2nd French SF Congress in Angoulême, after two days out of touch, to find everyone in the hotel lounge staring at the TV screen, just as the last helicopter was lifting off. We both polished the text, and it was all done, pretty speedily and without problems or disagreements. The book grew outwards organically from a centre, rather than being written chapter by chapter, turn by turn.

EXTRo: Onward to your newest book, *Deathhunter*, which grew from your (damn good, I thought) short "A Cage For Death" —

WATSON: The story in *Omni*, yes. Actually, the novel has some of the same scenes, but otherwise a different setting entirely; and characters are shifted around and renamed. *Deathhunter* is an expansion of the idea, rather than of the text of the story. Chapter One of *Deathhunter* is by no means "A Cage For Death", in the way that "Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand" is Chapter One of *Dreamsnake*.

EXTRo: I suppose the novel and short-story forms are so different that the odds are against such an approach working.

WATSON: Well, exactly. If a short story works successfully as a story, then simply making it into chapter one of a novel verbatim by no means guarantees a successful novel. If anything, the opposite is likely!

EXTRo: Just been reading proofs of *Deathhunter* (got my chip butty wrapped in them, actually): I liked the way an almost conventional and vaguely satirical narrative suddenly starts throwing up disorienting shocks, beginning with the onstage appearance of Death itself (from "Cage") and then topping even that several times. An accessible book, especially since the point of death, and after, must be where metaphysics becomes important to everyone. An "innocent", spontaneous book, or another which dragged you into its questions?

WATSON: Midway between the two, I'd say. *Deathhunter* grew from a short story which ended with a massive question mark: what on earth happens next? So initially, this was a narrative, story-telling challenge, rather than a metaphysical question mark. The novel really grew out of the image, of the death-creature caged — rather than any pre-existing theory about

death. But then, the solving of the problem required relocating the action of the story, into a society much more occupied with their own theory of death. Out of which the narrative of the novel could then evolve. Then spontaneous narrative took over, since the ending of the book — the last two chapters — came as a complete double surprise to me.

EXTRo: Me too. Now, all I know of the novel after *Deathhunter* is that you've mentioned a "comic" approach ... that right?

WATSON: Yes, that's the book we're talking about. It's a slapstick comedy, concerning the theme of the superhuman. Maybe there's too much slap and not enough stick? But it was the book that I felt like writing at the time. Now I'm in the preliminary stages of a wholly new SF novel, about which all I'm prepared to say is that it is set in 19th century Russia. I'm back from off-world, with a vengeance.

EXTRo: But your latest book is in fact your first attempt at editing an anthology. *Pictures at an Exhibition*. This, as I know too well, has the most warped approaches of any original anthology I've met: what sparked it off?

WATSON: This is published by Lionel Fanthorpe's Greystoke Mobray publishing venture. Until I met Lionel my kneejerk reaction was, "God, that foul hack!" Fifteen seconds after meeting him, I realised he's a wonderful human being. He was wanting to publish an original anthology ... We batted ideas around, and as I'd just written *Gardens*, set in a Bosch painting, I thought of all the other paintings that it would be interesting to enter; hence the original idea. But they needed a framework, and this emerged from the fertile brain of Roger Campbell, a member of the Norwich SF Group. And a very ingenious framework it is indeed.

By a marvellous synergy, all the stories by different hands fit this framework, and dovetail into each other wonderfully, even though they're all quite independent of each other at the same time. Mike Bishop explores the ambiguous world of Magritte, Chris Morgan the heroic landscape of Frazetta. And of course you've done Dürer, Dave ... But as to the framework which Explains All, I'm not giving the game away!

EXTRo: What about the anthology *Changes*, with Mike, I mean Michael, Bishop?

WATSON: It's part original and part reprint, and should appear from Ace Books in the summer of 1982. It's about sudden metamorphosis. We've got original stories from Richard

Cowper, Tom Disch and Ursula Le Guin already in; we have promises from George R. R. Martin and Chris Priest. Harlan Ellison read a story over the phone to my co-editor, but unfortunately Mike doesn't have a speakerphone attached to his phone, and we haven't been able to extract the words in written form ...

EXTRo: Um. Speaking of metamorphosis, haven't I heard that word or very similar mentioned in connection with your "slapstick" book?

WATSON: Yes, *Metamorphoses* (as in Ovid's) is the title of the slapstick book. Whose fate is unpredictable.

EXTRo: Does that (in conjunction with the fact that your anthologies are first appearing from other publishers) imply that not all your future novels may be issued, as traditional, by Gollancz?

WATSON: (Mouth crammed with chip butty, he failed to answer.)

EXTRo: We've heard from Watson the Novelist, the Didact and the Editor — after standing as Helmdon's Labour candidate in the May council elections (and getting a respectable third of the vote, too), what does Watson the Politician have to say?

WATSON: I would like to see a socialist government in Britain. Michael Foot has proved to be a disappointment; he has waffled, and betrayed the cause of unilateral nuclear disarmament to which he was committed. Conceivably Tony Benn may betray his principles too, once he is in a position of real power — though I sincerely hope not. But if so, there will be others who will put into practice what they have preached.

EXTRo: But what about your own campaign?

WATSON: Heroic stuff. Judy and I canvassed 29 villages, in blizzards and freezing rain and other manifestations of the British spring. Apart from help from some leafletters, there were only us two. But instead of sitting back laughing, the Tories pulled out all the stops: setting up committee rooms, laying on transport to take sick, mummified and senile voters to the booths. The turn-out was very high, so I think we probably got the maximum possible Labour vote in this political Blue Hole; but the Tories likewise whipped up a huge turn-out ...

EXTRo: Less earth-shaking but more science-fictional, you recently became UK rep of the SF Writers of America. Do you think we mere "overseas members" can have a worthwhile influence on the often US-chauvinist SFWA?

WATSON: SFWA is a slightly disorganised organisation at times. I may be the British Rep, but I've been missed out of the Membership Directory, and my new computer mailing label altogether omits the name of the place where I live. Which makes it miraculous that the mail still arrives, pencilled with queries and speculations by the post office. But SFWA is getting itself sorted out. And of course overseas members can have an influence — in proportion to the number who join. If everyone who is eligible in Britain, Europe, etc, joins ... then it'll become a different kind of organisation; and all to the good. Eligibility does not at present depend on publishing in America, or even in the English language. Merely on professional publication.

EXTRo: What do you think of the SF market today?

WATSON: The British market is still on its knees because of that crippling element, Blue Thatcherite. The situation in America seems reasonably healthy. Some publishers are axeing, but others are expanding. Some magazines go under, but others are emerging, or being reborn. *Galaxy* could well be refinanced again soon, for example. *Omni* is spinning off a new SF magazine.

EXTRo: Meanwhile, do you ever find that shadow of market requirements falling between the idea and the reality — the ideal and the finished novel? (Or between the novel and the large advance?)

WATSON: What large advance? ... On the whole, I write what I want to write. Subsequent editorial suggestions are often quite helpful ones — helpful to the work itself. To a reasonable extent, one can create one's audience, though admittedly there are a lot of adverse market pressures around. Well, there are also quite a lot of markets, too. For instance, right now the Germans are getting fed up to the teeth with horror and dumb SF. As one zone sinks, so another rises.

EXTRo: I hope that's true. As for being fed up to the teeth, what's your favourite way to make chip butties?

WATSON: I use oven-cook chips, myself. Incidentally, there's a good pub in Daventry (near Moreton Pinkney) that sells chip butties.

EXTRo: Last question. I'm afraid I'm going to say it. They all say it. There is no escape from it. OK, I'll say it now. Do you plan to carry on writing SF?

WATSON: Yes.

EXTRo: Thank you, Ian Watson.

The Ceres Solution by Bob Shaw

— Gollancz, 1981 186pp £5.95

Good SF can pack a hell of a lot into a small space, without ever overwhelming the reader. In this novel, the admirable Mr. Shaw covers teleportation, astounding longevity, a new angle on ley lines, a mind-wrenching theory about the baleful influence of the Moon, a love story, action-packed adventure — and enough thoughtful asides on the human condition to justify making this a set book for an Eng. Lit. exam. All in 186 pages!

And yet, master of craft that he is, Shaw never makes you feel you're being force-fed with ideas. The plot unfolds, in fact,

in a deceptively leisurely way and the action really hots up only towards the end — by which time the reader is fully adjusted to the characters and is ready to enjoy the change of pace.

The story starts when a 12-year-old Canadian boy, Denry Hargate, crippled by a nervous disease, meets an incredibly beautiful young woman. Full of his own bitterness, he insults her, goes back to make amends, but instead sees her trace a complex shape in the air with her hand . . . and disappear.

She is, in fact, an observer

from the planet Mollan, one of a team who have been chronicling Earth history from near its beginning. On Mollan, life expectancy is 5,000 years and travel is achieved by a form of teleportation involving the disciplined use of abstruse mathematics.

The paths of Denry and Gretana cross again 20 years later, but this time the meeting leads to a shattering series of events, as our hero realises that humanity is a sad and stunted relation of the Mollanians.

I dare not say too much, but one hint shouldn't spoil the book . . . have you ever wondered what the Earth would be like without the Moon?

As to the questions that the

novel itself raises, these range from general ethics (Does the end always justify the means?) to specific morals (Can a hurtful action be excused on the grounds that the person inflicting it is suffering even more?).

I shudder to think of the enormous tome, with scores of characters and sub-plots, that some authors would have produced from the wealth of imagination implicit in the story's background.

Instead we have this little gem, no eternal classic to be sure, but finely polished, sharply characterised, clearly told, and lingering in the memory like the taste of mint. Bob Shaw has done it again, bless him.

reviewed by Barry Seddon

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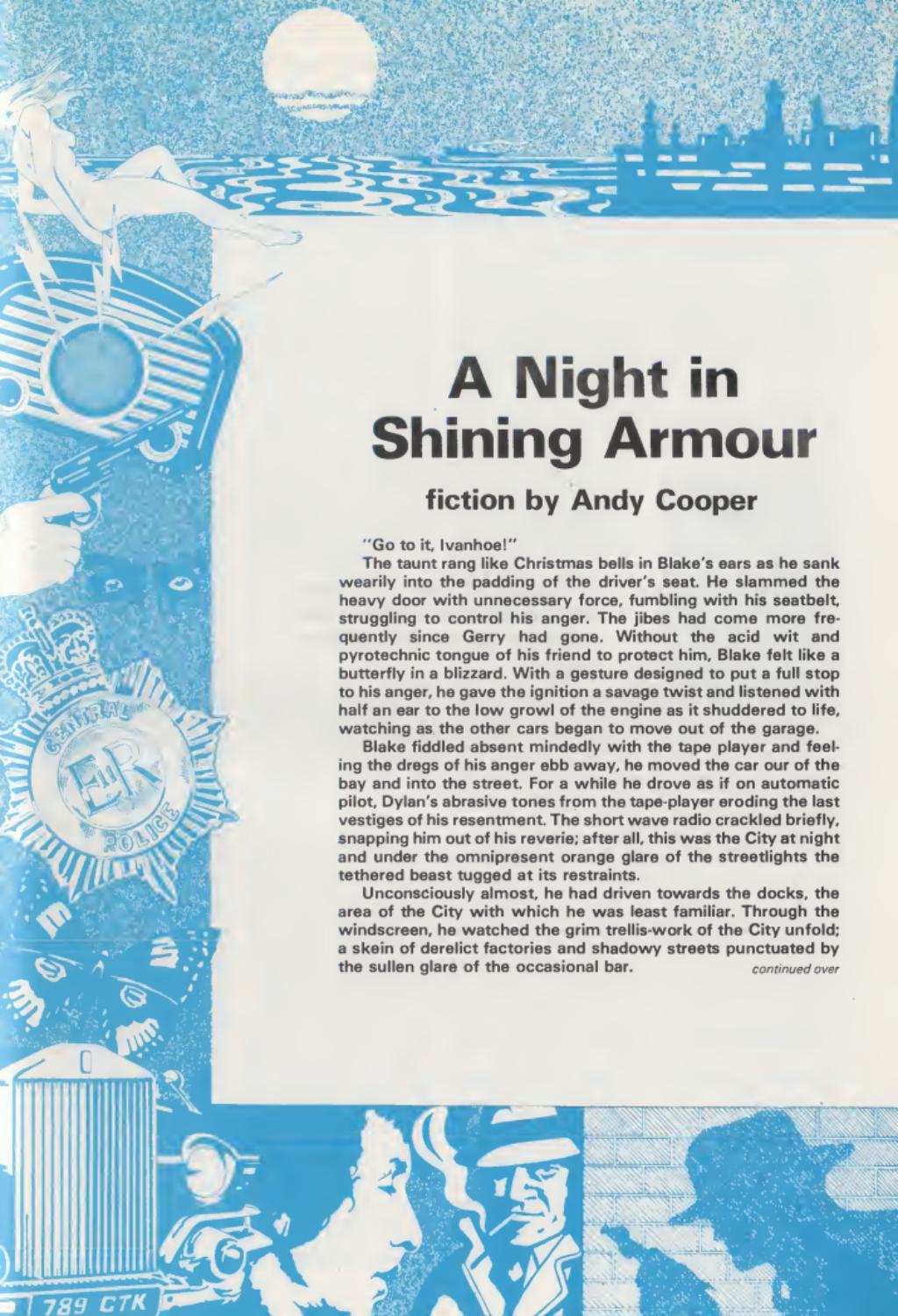
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A Night in Shining Armour

fiction by Andy Cooper

"Go to it, Ivanhoe!"

The taunt rang like Christmas bells in Blake's ears as he sank wearily into the padding of the driver's seat. He slammed the heavy door with unnecessary force, fumbling with his seatbelt, struggling to control his anger. The jibes had come more frequently since Gerry had gone. Without the acid wit and pyrotechnic tongue of his friend to protect him, Blake felt like a butterfly in a blizzard. With a gesture designed to put a full stop to his anger, he gave the ignition a savage twist and listened with half an ear to the low growl of the engine as it shuddered to life, watching as the other cars began to move out of the garage.

Blake fiddled absent mindedly with the tape player and feeling the dregs of his anger ebb away, he moved the car out of the bay and into the street. For a while he drove as if on automatic pilot, Dylan's abrasive tones from the tape-player eroding the last vestiges of his resentment. The short wave radio crackled briefly, snapping him out of his reverie; after all, this was the City at night and under the omnipresent orange glare of the streetlights the tethered beast tugged at its restraints.

Unconsciously almost, he had driven towards the docks, the area of the City with which he was least familiar. Through the windscreens, he watched the grim trellis-work of the City unfold; a skein of derelict factories and shadowy streets punctuated by the sullen glare of the occasional bar.

continued over

Night — Cooper

It was here that Gerry had finally run out of luck; a stray bullet from a 'Saturday Night Special' pulverising his kneecap, ensuring that he would never again walk without the aid of a stick and effectively ending his career with the force. The kids he'd been chasing had disappeared into the dockland gloom like wraiths, protected by the customary wall of silence erected against the common enemy. By the time he'd come home from hospital 3 weeks later, news had already got around that the great Gerry Allen, crimebuster extraordinary, was no longer protected by a badge and the neighbourhood villains who'd been hassled by him for years were waiting. After all, Gerry was now just another no-hope citizen, and the police could spare no more time to investigate his murder than they could for any other. Somewhere in the city's teeming maze, Gerry's killers were free to kill again, and the police lacked the necessary manpower and resources to devote to their capture.

Such had been the indifferent response of the Supervisor when Blake confronted him, and Blake's furious retort had earned him a week's suspension. That had been a month ago, and since then, Gerry's widow, Linda, had joined the slow hopeless drain of humanity to the Camps.

Blake swerved violently round the wreckage of a dismembered car as he thought of Linda in there; the Leisure Camps, the last tired reflex of an overstrained bureaucracy with too many mouths to feed; live in unimaginable luxury for 3 weeks whilst they fed you banquets stuffed with drugs which took you higher and higher, so that by the time your heart gave up under the strain, you were too smashed to care. Blake's features taunted as he realised that Linda was probably dead by now. He recalled the glazed horror in her eyes after their trip to identify Gerry's mutilated corpse, and the long tearful sessions of coffee and cigarettes in the days that followed, as Blake had laboured unsuccessfully to stop her from applying for the Camps. Somehow, he couldn't find it in his heart to blame her for what she'd done; with no children to divert her, Gerry had been her whole life, and she had long since lost the callous self-motivation necessary to survive as a single woman in this city, so rather than treading the narrow causeway of lonely bitterness which lay ahead, she had opted for the swift and easy oblivion of the Camps.

Blake himself had found it tough going without Gerry's cheerful wit to shield him. Both of them unpopular amongst the

rest of the 'cruisers' mainly because they refused to subscribe to the mood of general brutality which pervaded the force. Gerry had always been of the opinion that the relationship between the policeman and the average citizen had always been akin to warfare, but in this society such attitudes were becoming explicit rather than merely implied, and Gerry had become a victim in a war where little was expected, and nothing given in the way of quarter. Some of the other 'cruisers' in Blake's outfit were now openly keeping a 'hit-list' on the station wall, with a prize at the end of each month for the cruiser with the most 'kills' to his name. Blake's refusal to participate in this gruesome lottery had led to the label of 'Ivanhoe' being thrust upon him, and lacking the incisive wit of Gerry to aid him, he could only splutter and fume in impotent rage. He'd considered resignation, but to do so would be suicidal these days; Blake had forgotten how many million it was now, but he was determined that the moronic baiting of his col-

leagues would not shift him; he'd always been a cop, what else could he do? For the moment he would soldier on, though he dreaded the nights now, not just because of the killers who might lurk around each corner, but also fearing the scorn of his colleagues, continuing because there seemed to be no other option, telling himself that Gerry had been right to insist that indulgence in legalised butchery was worse than crime itself.

Leaving the docks behind, he turned left on to the ring road, listening to the strangulated whine of the power steering as it hauled the heavy car round the corner. Small children by the roadside pelted the car with stones as he passed; it wasn't that they discriminated against him as a police cruiser in particular, to them cars meant the rich who were to be made to choke on their affluence whenever possible. Vaguely, Blake considered stopping and going back for them, but he knew that they would have vanished into the night long before he reached them.

He was about to make his regular half-hourly call to base when the radio squawked into life: a robbery this time, some high-class jewellers near the bus station selling stuff only the privileged and the powerful could afford. Blake allowed

himself a sardonic smile as he recognised McKenzie's call-sign in the message; so, 'Ol' Hotshot himself, Numero Uno on the hit-list was at the scene, but encountering resistance, and in need of help, even if it came from 'Ivanhoe'. He answered the radio and sped off into the night.

Nearer the scene of McKenzie's distress, the car began to buck on the uneven road surfaces and Blake recalled this as the location of last month's food riots when much of the tarmac had been spiderwebbed by sledgehammers, then prised up in chunks for use as ammunition by the rioters. It went without saying that no public money was available to repair the damage. Ahead of him, a light van suddenly darted out of a side-street, moving much too fast and turning too late to avoid a lamp-post on the opposite side of the street. Above the erratic percussion of his tyres and the swaying creak of the car's suspension, Blake registered the dull thud of impact and the subsequent diminuendo of tinkling glass. As he pulled up some 30 yards away,

The relationship between the policeman and the average citizen was akin to warfare.

Mckenzie's black sedan issued from the dark side-street like a gliding shark from the depths, and ploughed into the side of the van. Blake grabbed a bullhorn from under the dash, leapt out and crouched behind the armoured door of his vehicle.

"OK, this is the police," Blake's voice spat from the bullhorn, echoing from the surrounding buildings like a whip in a biscuit tin. "I want you to step slowly out of the van with your hands clasped on top of your heads!"

Despite himself, Blake smiled. He had heard this drivel so many times on the teevee: intrepid, upright law-enforcement officer captures villainous criminals. Coming from his own mouth, those pious words tasted odd, like the time he'd muttered his way through the Lord's Prayer at Gerry's funeral; strange words like *tin* in your mouth and the suspicion that it was only hollow ritual. Nonetheless, the pistol-crack of the van's rear door opening on tired hinges was real enough, as were the two people stepping forth, hands dutifully atop their heads. For a moment, whimsy almost overtook him; he felt that if he'd told them to dance a jig on the spot they might well have been equally compliant. But common sense prevailed.

"Keep those hands there and

walk slowly towards me," rapped the disembodied bullhorn voice. Like obedient film extras, the two men began to move. Dimly, Blake became aware that 'Hotshot' McKenzie had decided to put in a belated appearance, struggling from his car, gun in hand. Sight of McKenzie's weapon made Blake aware of the pistol in his own hand for the first time; he had no recollection of unholstering it, but it now nestled snugly in his right palm almost like an old friend with a mind and a volition of its own. As the two men approached him, Blake discarded the bullhorn and straightened up, noticing as he did so the third figure slumped across the wheel of the wrecked van. The first shot had Blake down behind the door of his car again, and it was a few dazed seconds before he realised that McKenzie, coming up behind the two men, had shot them in the back. In the orange light of the street, two verticals had become horizontals and as Blake watched, a third shot rang out, making the van's helpless driver twitch like a spastic puppet. Rage and disbelief fought to a rapid stalemate in Blake's mind as he emerged from his shelter and raced towards the van. There he found McKenzie, his left side dark with blood, pallid of face and perspiring heavily. Blake's quickfire gaze revealed nothing by way of explanation on McKenzie's face.

"You Bastard!", was all he could scream, and again the words felt hollow, a limp curse from some tepid teevee melodrama. McKenzie, breathing heavily, merely flickered an indifferent glance in Blake's direction.

"Save it for your Sunday School, Ivanhoe, and get me a bloody ambulance before I bleed to death."

The rest of the night passed quietly enough and the pre-dawn greyness found Blake still fleeing from McKenzie's words, his mind a slowly-cooling cauldron of horror. He took to the coast road, parked by some dowdy beach huts and sat staring out to sea, eyes vacant, the night's events playing and replaying in his mind. He'd threatened to report McKenzie, of course, but the callous executioner had just shrugged his shoulders.

"My word against yours, old son. Anyway, do you really think they'd take any notice of you? Can you see they want you out?" Soft bastards like you have had your day. In times like this, it's results that count, not methods, besides which I've just shortened the food queues by tw'n Report away, Ivanhoe; chances are they'll give me a

continued

bloody medal."

Blake ground out another cigarette but and opened his window to let the sea air in. A distant stink like burnt rubber from the kelp-processing plant up the coast blended with the fresher salt tang of the sea; "Soft bastards like you . . ." Suddenly, the car which had for so long been a haven seemed like a tomb, filled with the ashes of empty dreams, stinking of sweat, bitterness and fear. Blake threw the door open and clambered out into the biting cold, grabbing a heavy topcoat from the back seat. Shrugging into it, he began to walk along the seafront, trying to clear the smoke from his lungs and the fear from his mind.

The implications of McKenzie's comments were still reverberating around his head; 'they' wanted him out. Who were 'they', and how had Blake offended? Perhaps it was just the other cruisers who wanted him out; that was nothing new as far as Blake was concerned, but even as this familiar concept began to snuggled around his fears, Blake threw it off. No, there was more to McKenzie's veiled comments than mere internecine bullying. Of course, McKenzie could merely be repeating office gossip, but that idea didn't mollify Blake's unease either. His mind slipped back to some of Gerry's comments about the increasingly aggressive attitudes of the police as a whole these days. Gerry had suggested that not only were such attitudes tolerated, but that high-level officers were encouraging what they referred to euphemistically as a more 'positive' response to lawbreakers. Again, Blake recalled Gerry's description of the way in which the citizen and the police were engaged in a form of warfare; now it seemed to Blake that the battle of wits was turning to a more obvious form of conflict in which extremism and savagery would triumph over any moderation. "Soft bastards like you . . ." the derisory phrase squirmed like some evil snake in the recesses of Blake's mind; if this was war then he was stranded firmly in no-man's-land.

In the half-light of a dull September morning, sudden movement on the beach below caught Blake's eye. A multi-legged creature resolved itself into three men and a naked girl; two held her down whilst the third thrust furiously between her legs. As he watched, one heaved to a climax, withdrew and was replaced by another. In the changeover, a stifled whimper escaped, the girl was instantly slapped to silence. Galvanized by the girl's half-cry, Blake vaulted the railing and crashed to the sand, breaking

the intense pumping silence of the group. The tableau sustained a mere second, then sudden movement everywhere, and the girl's scream rising like a gull on the morning air. Metal glinted sharp to Blake's left and he fired from the hip, spinning the youth into the sea-wall in a gout of red. The girl's most recent assailant was on his feet now, naked from the waist down, an almost comical figure in the midst of an already bizarre scene. Blake wiped a red gash across his forehead with the barrel of his gun, spun to face the other, but he was away like the wind, 20 yards and more down the beach. Above the roar of the surf, Blake called for him to halt, received no answer, the gun kicked again and the youth crashed to the sand.

Blake remained frozen, gun poised, waiting. But there was nothing more. An indifferent foghorn bleated somewhere up the coast; the waves continued to roll in. Tension eased behind Blake's eyes and he turned to the object of all this violence, who was crying softly, still

on her small breasts with her torn blouse. Blake noticed her shivering, removed his coat and offered it to her. Without taking her eyes from his face, she snatched at the coat, draping it around her shoulders, then grovelled in the sand behind her for her gaudy handbag. Finally, she tried to get to her feet, but her thin legs wobbled like green saplings beneath her, and she would have fallen again, had Blake not grabbed her arm to support her. At this, she shot her rescuer a fearful glance, but nonetheless leaned heavily on his arm. The girl began to rummage frantically through her bag, dislodging Blake's coat from its perch on her shoulders. He stooped to retrieve it from the sand, and by the time he straightened up again, her desperate search had ended, and she again leaned hard on his arm as she pivoted gracefully round to face him, driving the knife up under his ribcage. She lurched away as he fell, wrapping the coat more tightly around her as she paused to observe her handiwork.

"soft bastards like you have had your day."

spreadeagled to the sky. Blake moved towards her, stopped in surprise as she wriggled away from him. He gave her an appraising glance; the tear-streaked face, ruined clothing, lank blonde hair . . . he estimated her age at no more than 14.

"C'mon love. It's OK, I'm a policeman."

Her bloodshot eyes were on him now, still streaming mingled tears and mascara, but she made no response other than a half hearted and futile wipe at the gritty scum and semen plastering her thighs, following this with an equally vain attempt to cover the bruises and red finger-imprints

"Bloody coppers," she pronounced, rolling a wad of spit round her tongue before depositing it with uncanny accuracy on Blake's head. Re-adjusting the coat once more, she moved quickly off down the beach.

A red agony suffused Blake's mind as he lay on the beach. If he could only get rid of the sand clogging his mouth, he could call for help. McKenzie would come, he felt sure, drawn by the smell of blood, or maybe Gerry, but then Gerry was . . . Blake coughed weakly, brassy taste of blood in his throat, then felt the hand turning on his shoulder, rolling him over on to his back.

HUGO AWARDS

THE 1981 HUGO AWARDS (Science Fiction Achievement Awards for work published in 1980). (Announced at Denvention II, 39th World SF Convention, Denver, Colorado, (Sept 3-7 1981).

Novel: THE SNOW QUEEN by Joan Vinge, Novella: 'Lost Dorsai' by Gordon Dickson, Short Story: 'Grotto of the Dancing Deer' by Clifford Simak, Nonfiction: COSMOS (book) by

Carl Sagan, Professional Editor: Edward Ferman of F&SF, Pro Artist: Michael Whelan, Fanzine: LOCUS, Fanwriter: Susan Wood (deceased), Fan Artist: Victoria Poyer, Dramatic Presentation: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer: Somtow Sucharitkul (Not a Hugo).

And Baltimore won the 1983 Worldcon bidding.

And really, these results do seem to show still more than in previous years that

He opened his eyes, saw the figure looming astride him, framed by the pink clouds of dawn. 'Red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning', he said to himself, then squinted up at the figure again. The gash Blake had given him was still oozing blood, but it would heal without scarring. Blake was glad to see that he'd put his trousers back on; indecent exposure would only lengthen the list of charges against him. But that flick-knife he'd just pulled, now that was strictly illegal, Blake would have to tell him about that. As the youth bent to his work with the knife, pain washed over Blake again. He found himself unable to feel anger somehow; Gerry had been right after all, it was a war and Blake was neither the first victim, nor would he be the last.

Andrew Cooper 1980



Andy Cooper was born and raised in Northampton. In recent years he has resided in Bedford, Copenhagen and Manchester. An ex teacher (quit disillusioned) and ex record shop manager (made redundant) he is due to become a born again student at Newcastle University in October.

'A Night in Shining Armour' is his first published story and he is still amazed that he ever completed it (usually loses interest half way through) and is vague about any further writing.

His hobbies include music, photography and travelling. He possesses an oversize record collection and two cats. Ambitions are to live in Norway, join the idle rich and live in interesting times.

the Goths are amongst us. The two best (and most acclaimed) sf/fantasy novels of 1980 were undoubtedly Benford's *TIMESCAPE* and Wolfe's *THE SHADOW OF THE TORTURER*, neither of which was even *bloody nominated* for the Hugo. (Though Timescape has won *all* the other major awards: Nebula (SWFA), BSFA Award (Britain), JWC Memorial Award (presented by expert committee of international of pundits), Ditmar (Australia) . . .).

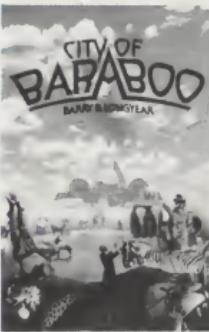
Send in The Clowns

by Chris Evans

ONE of the besetting evils of the science fiction category is that it tends to group together in readers' minds writers whose ambitions and abilities are quite disparate. Thus at one extreme we have authors as erudite and as creatively adventurous as Thomas M. Disch and Samuel R. Delany, and at the other extreme writers such as Marion Zimmer Bradley and Jerry Pournelle, who make no bones about the fact that their aim is to produce escapist adventure stories tailored to a mass market. For the reader encountering sf for the first time such a range of writers must seem a bit bewildering: it's as if Mills & Boon, in ad-

suggesting the development of the star-circus . . . and for many suggestions that should earn him a generously declined byline". In other words, Scithers helped create the stories and hence the book.

City of Baraboo is about a travelling circus — the last circus on Earth, which is in danger of closing until saved by the resourceful John O'Hara, who arranges for a spaceship to be constructed which will transport the circus off Earth so that it can embark on a tour of the inhabited worlds of the galaxy. To achieve this, however, O'Hara has to



City of Baraboo by Barry B. Longyear — Berkley Putnam, 1980, \$10.95
Mockingbird by Walter Tevis — Hodder and Stoughton, 1980, £5.95

dition to their regular romances, also published novels such as *Wuthering Heights* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* because both are "love stories". An extreme example? Perhaps, but the diversity of writing which still shelters under the umbrella is increasing all the time.

The above thoughts were in part prompted by the two books under review here. Both are manifestly sf, and both have been published as such. The authors are both Americans whose names will be familiar to keen students of science fiction. Yet both books are very different from one another in aim and scope.

Barry Longyear is a relative newcomer to the field, having been publishing short stories (mostly in *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine*) for only two years. But he's become quite popular in this short time, and seems to have a rosy future ahead of him. *City of Baraboo* is one of those well-loved sf hybrids, the fix-up, a series of linked short stories which is not quite a novel but has a continuity of narrative and cast throughout. Most of the stories were originally published in the aforementioned magazine, and the book is dedicated in part to its editor, George Scithers, "for

outflank the technical owner of the circus, Arnhem, who had intended to deliver the newly constructed starship to the alien Nuumians as an attack transport. Arnhem becomes the circus's mortal enemy after it leaves Earth, and continually tries to plot its destruction.

The circus has the expected gallimaufry of colourful characters (the company, listed at the back of the book, numbers no less than seventy-seven). There's the stern but basically warm-hearted Boss Canvasman, the lugubrious but impeccable Treasurer, the sensitive "freaks" of the sideshow, and so on. They're all valuable, larger-than-life folk, utterly devoted to the circus and loyal to O'Hara. And Arnhem is a suitably villainous villain.

The stories in this collection are models of the kind of writing commonly found in American sf magazines. Each has a straightforward storyline with an effective and essentially upbeat ending. Even at the last, when the ship carrying the circus is forced to crashland on an uninhabited (but habitable) planet and most of the leading characters die, we eventually discover that the survivors build a thriving community based on cir-

cus life. It's easy to understand why these stories proved popular on their original appearance and why this collection will doubtless find an appreciative readership. It reads very easily, and each story delivers exactly what it promises.

So why did this book leave me cold? Because it never presented a challenge to me as a reader: I never became deeply involved in the dilemmas of any of the characters because none of them seemed real. They're stereotypes lifted from Sam Goldwyn movies with props courtesy of the science fiction genre. The stories in this book are commercial products designed by a proficient writer under the guidance of an experienced editor to provide adolescent wish-fulfillment for the readership of a magazine renowned for its conservative policies. That they are efficient examples of their kind does not diminish for me the fact that they are also the prose equivalents of comic strips.

And what's wrong with that, you might ask. Why shouldn't some writers produce the lightweight and optimistic fictions for which a large audience clearly exists? This is a difficult question to answer, and leads us into the murky realms of what the whole business of literature

should be. As it happens, Walter Tevis's *Mockingbird* attempts an answer to this question, so let's turn to that.

Mockingbird is a book of quite a different mettle from *City of Baraboo*. To start with, it's a real novel, rather than an extended narrative; the characters in it are affected and changed by their experiences. It's also a book of a rather dark mood, and no easy answers are provided for any of the problems which confront the characters in it. But it lives. It has an intelligence and a creative vitality which are missing from flashier but superficial books such as *City of Baraboo*. Walter Tevis has not written much over the years, but his two previous novels (*The Hustler* and *The Man Who Fell to Earth*) are still highly regarded by many people (and both, incidentally, were made into successful films). One must assume that Tevis is only stirred to write when a theme captures his imagination, and it also seems reasonable to suppose that he allows his ideas to gestate and mature in his mind before he begins to commit them to paper.

Mockingbird has all the hallmarks of a carefully conceived and crafted story. The blurb writer has gone a bit overboard,

comparing it to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World*; it's not in the same league as these books (which are genuine classics of science fiction, unlike the outdated genre novels of the so-called 'Golden Age' which publishers are still serving up as classics). But it's an interesting, ambitious novel which has a real imaginative impetus running through it and also possesses the solid literary virtues (often dismissed by hardcore sf writers) of good prose and mostly effective characterisation.

The story takes place about four hundred years in the future. Civilisation is in decay, and ageing robots watch over the remnants of humanity who no longer reproduce and live lives blunted by drugs. Strict rules of Privacy and Mandatory Politeness inculcated into them during their childhood ensure a minimum of human contact and intimacy, and maxims such as "Don't think; relax" and "Quick sex is best" have also been provided to ensure a society free from the aggression and competitiveness which have been the cause of endless wars in the past. But people are still unhappy, and from time to time commit suicide by dousing their bodies with petrol and setting themselves on fire.

At the apex of this moribund society is Spofforth, a Mark Nine humanoid robot, the most sophisticated and last of his kind. Spofforth's brain has been encoded with most (but not all) of the memories of a long dead scientist; he has sufficient human feelings to realise that he can never be fully human, and is desperately unhappy because of this. Each spring he climbs to the top of the Empire State Building and tries to kill himself by jumping off. But a self-protecting mechanism programmed into him after the suicides of the other Mark Nines prevents him from doing so.

Enter Bentley, a human who has rediscovered and relearned the forgotten art of reading. Spofforth takes Bentley under his tutelage, and Bentley also meets Mary Lou, who he teaches to read. Bentley and Mary Lou eschew all drugs and the Privacy conventions, cohabiting with one another against the rules. Through old films, literature and poetry they discover something of the past. Then Spofforth abruptly has Bentley sent to jail. Spofforth moves in with Mary Lou, hoping that by living with her as a "husband" this will

continued

enable him to recapture the memories which will make him whole.

Meanwhile in prison Bentley discovers more books and gradually realises what a blind, passive existence he has been leading. Eventually he escapes from the prison and, after some hardship and a period of time living with a religious community in an underground shopping centre, decides to return to New York to find Mary Lou. By this time Mary Lou has given birth to his baby and has learned that Spofforth is responsible for the sterility of the human population, doctoring their tranquilizers and sleeping pills with anti-fertility agents. Spofforth has been programmed to care for the human race, and only when they are extinct will he be able to find release from the pain of his existence.

Bentley and Mary Lou are reunited, and Mary Lou persuades Spofforth to stop all issues of drugs to the surviving population. In return, she and Bentley accompany the robot to the top of the Empire State Building and there, in accordance with his wishes, they push him off, finally giving him the death which he craves.

Spofforth's sad fatalism is very similar to the mood of the alien in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* — it's a state of mind which the author obviously identifies with strongly. Tevis rather overdoes the pathos in the closing scene by having a sparrow land on Spofforth's arm, but this is a rare lapse. Spofforth, despite being a robot, is someone whom the reader can respond to far more strongly than to any of the other characters (cetericutes) in *City of Babbooo*, because Spofforth has real feelings: his dilemma is a human one. (There's irony in this, because the human population have been effectively robotized by the society in which they live.) Tevis also succeeds in making a vehicle (a thought bus which telepathically responds to its passengers' mental commands) the most affectionate "character" in the book, while Bentley, who has the lion's share of the narrative, matures as the story progresses into a full-blooded human being who comes to realise that passion and conflict are essential for a fully human existence.

There are some nice touches elsewhere in the book. At one point, Bentley, after his escape from prison, reaches a factory manned entirely by robots which manufactures toasters. The robots have been blindly working for perhaps hundreds of years, forgotten by the humans who made them. Bentley discovers that a microchip has blocked a hopper with the result that all the

toasters lack a heating unit and are instantly junked and recycled into the system, a process which has just gone on and on.

"I reached out and jiggled the hopper with my hand until the chip came loose . . . A few moments later at the end of the line, the inspector robot flipped up the switch on that toaster and its element glowed red. He showed no surprise but merely flipped the switch back off and set the toaster in an empty carton, and then repeated his action. I watched him fill up a carton with twenty toasters ready for shipping. I had not the remotest idea how they would be shipped or where, but I felt pleased with what I had done."

So what is *Mockingbird* ultimately about? It's about the nature of humanity, about the need for human beings to communicate and share their lives with others in order to realise their humanity in its fullest sense. The idea that individuals will remain unfulfilled if they are alone is emphasised at the end, for Spofforth can only die with the help of Mary Lou and Bentley.

Mockingbird is also about the purpose (for want of a better word) of literature and of art in general. Towards the end of the book, Bentley muses:

" . . . the courage to know and to sense my feelings . . . has come, slowly, from the emotionally charged silent films at the old library at first and then later from the poems and novels and histories and biographies and how-to-it books that I have read. All of those books — even the dull and nearly incomprehensible ones — have made me understand more clearly what it means to be a human being. And I have learned from the sense of awe I at times develop when I feel in touch with the mind of another, long-dead person and know that I am not alone on this earth. There have been others who have felt as I feel and who have at times, been able to say the unsayable."

This quote is central to the book, and the kind of dialogue of minds which Bentley describes is the hallmark of all the best literature. Books such as *City of Babbooo* obviously do provide some communication on a rudimentary level, but ultimately they are little more than diversions which help keep the real world at bay for a few hours. The best literature enriches and enlightens the reader, and it does so because it springs from the individualistic visions of its creators.

I would suggest that when a writer sits down to produce work to satisfy what he conceives of as his audience's expectations, he's actually showing some con-

tempt for them: he views them as cattle who must be fed the appropriate fodder. By contrast, writers who look to themselves and who tackle themes and ideas which are pertinent and deeply personal to them are, far from being dismissive of their readership, actually doing the only thing by which they might hope to communicate with (rather than simply spoonfeed) their readers. By imbuing their work with a personal vision, they offer

drift, a mysterious space dust, falls frequently on the earth. Moondrift is a power source which appears to have no ugly side effect — bar one: coincidental with its arrival on earth people begin disappearing to the accompaniment of strange music and the sweet smell of roses. The disappearances occur often enough to cause widespread terror. There appears to be no logical selection process and no one ever returns.

Caroline Trenchard's writer husband goes as he is preparing for bed one evening and in order to claim the life insurance she obtains a substitute body from rent-a-corpse, a sinister, clandestine organisation. Richard Wallingford, the investigating agent, discovers the fraud but promises not to report it providing he is given a cut. Thus begins a platonic affair between Caroline and a man whose tastes, manners and intellect — all the attributes that matter to her — she sees as being completely inferior to her own. Even these faults she can forgive him but not the final error. Together the pair of them weather the threats of underground syndicates and lunatic blackmailers but unhappily for Caroline she must always remain on top of her Plebeian partner in crime. I was relieved that the ending was not as ambiguous as Katherine Mortenhoe.

In playing *ascendencies* Caroline is careful to do an analysis of her opponent from the very start of their relationship:

'Caroline Trenchard wasn't sorry she'd told him what she thought of him. She recognized the type . . . he was one of life's losers, his back to the wall. And she knew that wall well, how uncomfortable it made you, how desperate. She'd been against it for thirty-one years . . .'

Sometimes however, she meets her match:

'The girl smiled again. "I know that game."

"I beg your pardon?"
"It's called *Ascendencies*. I've been playing it all my life." And, thought Caroline, with such an air of innocence as yours, probably rather better.'

For me *Ascendencies* was both compelling and entrancing. Neither the coming of the Moondrift, nor the disappearances, were ever fully explained. It is for this reason I believe the novel will be rejected by hardcore sf critics who see little worth in a book that does not satisfy their jaded requirements for Brilliant New Concepts complete with hows, wheres and whyfors.

"U.S.A. *The Sleeping Eye*".
Reviewed by Garry Kilworth



MOCKINGBIRD

a part of themselves to their readers and implicitly say: Look, this is how I see the world. What do you think?

This is the only real way by which a dialogue might be established between writer and reader; the rest is just empty conjuring tricks.

Ascendencies

by D. G. Compton

Gollancz £5.95

Ascendencies, on a per with *The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe*, concerns people.

The sf element within the novel shrinks to insignificance beside the superb characterisation and dialogue which have become the hallmark of D. G. Compton's books. *Ascendencies* is essentially a game of intellectual one-upmanship played by the main character Caroline Trenchard, a Katherine Mortenhoe with a sharper wit and longer claws.

The year is 1986 and Moon-

BOOK REVIEWS

"A Dream of Kinship." by Richard Cowper

— Gollancz. (£6.95)

"The Road to Corlay" left the Kinsfolk, and ourselves, eagerly awaiting the birth of Jane's child. Is he to be the lost singer of the Song of Songs, the child of the Bride of Time? We were interested in the struggle of Thomas of Norwich and the hush girl, Jane, to escape the Church's relentless pursuit. They were living, appealing characters, as were Peter and the original Tom in the short story "Piper at the Gates of Dawn".

If Cowper had tried, in "A Dream of Kinship", to give us more of the same, it would have been a more satisfactory novel, and the whole series of novels (for "Kinship" demonstrates that the material is there for a further sequel) would have been enhanced. He has dispensed with Carver, the twentieth century experimental subject who found himself in the mind of Thomas Norwich, and so gave "Corlay" an unnecessary science fiction slant. So there is more wordage for Cowper to develop his characters in this work — and characterisation is his strong point.

Instead of this, however, he

decides to cover a lot of ground. He takes us through from before the birth of Jane's child to . . . let's not spoil the ending; sufficient to say that this novel covers about twenty years of the boy's life. Cowper selects a series of incidents in the boy's development into a young man who questions, not only the established ruling church, but also his own place in Kinship. The problem is that, in any work spanning too great an interval of time it is usually necessary to have a strong storyline, and a well drawn central character, to tie the action together.

I felt that a strong storyline was missing here. How the cult of Kinship develops is, by itself, not enough to hold our interest, how the characters develop would be. But in "A Dream of Kinship" too many characters walk onto stage and, just when we're becoming interested in them, their motivations, their petty likes and dislikes, they walk off, to be replaced with the next in line. Lord Marshall Richard is a case in point. He is one of the bit players who, for all too short a time, occupies the centre of the stage. Cowper skilfully gains our

sympathy for him as we watch him, caught between his duty and his conscience, make decisions that will affect the whole of the seven kingdoms. Then he leaves us, abruptly, ungracefully and from the wings.

But during his appearances on stage Cowper's skill at character depiction does ensure that the story holds us. Even very minor characters are deftly and economically drawn:

"Milton Brynlas was a man in whose presence one could scarcely fail to be conscious of the skull beneath the skin and thus, by extension, of the brittle texture of human mortality." and his descriptive passages are never forced or awkward:

"A thin feathering of ice, scarcely more than a transparent filigree, floated upon the dark surface of the water . . ."

But Cowper doesn't often take us inside the head of his protagonist, Tom. So we are left with an unreal main character, surrounded with a number of interesting, but all too fleetingly glimpsed, secondary characters.

If it hadn't been Cowper, I might have approached this novel with a different outlook, and may have been less disappointed, but, apart from "Profundis", I've thoroughly enjoyed the rest of his work and was looking forward to "A

Dream of Kinship". It's worth reading: if you've read "Corlay" you'll want to read it, and you'll find enough in it to hold your attention. Cowper's depiction of life after the Flood is consistent and well rounded. His treatment of the Kinship movement, especially of Tom's uneasy questioning of it, indicates that this is not just a trite analogy of youthful Christianity against outworn Roman and pagan institutions. The hush is still interestingly handled, but tends to be present more as a hangover from "Corlay" than anything else.

So buy it and read it — not only is the piano player doing his best, but the bit parts will ensure that your interest doesn't flag. Cowper links one episode to the next with an easy economy that lures you onwards. Despite the span of the book, the style still manages to be relaxed and unhurried.

And "A Dream of Kinship" will be a necessary bridge between "The Road to Corlay" and "The Lost Singer" or "The Child of Time" or whatever Cowper decides to call the next one. For, I suspect, there will be another sequel: Tom has now grown up; we want to know what he intends to do about the creeping menace of Kinship.

Paul Campbell

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BOOK REVIEWS

"On Wings of Song", by Thomas M. Disch, Magnum: £1.50, 315pp Gollancz £5.95

If you can sing well enough, with enough feeling for the song and enough desire to escape the physical confines of this world, then you can fly. You can forsake your body and your spirit can soar.

Daniel's ambition is to fly. As a young boy he makes that his overriding purpose in life. Alas, the world is too much with him, and he has to come to grips with his own personality before he can escape. "Meke a mess of your life," a talented, murderous down-and-out tells him. "Then . . . the music pulls it all together."

On Wings of Song tells of the rise and fall of Daniel Weinreb, especially the fall. But how far does he have to fall? And even when he hits bottom (for him) and becomes a liveried whore servicing New York's Opera Land, has he fallen far enough?

The blur on this Magnificum edition emphasises the *Science Fiction* aspects of the novel: *twenty first century . . . megadecadent New York . . . a prison without bars where each prisoner carries an electrically controlled explosive in his stomach*. But the blur is misleading and some readers may be disappointed. "This isn't SF," they may complain. It certainly isn't and it probably is: who cares? It's a very good novel.

GARRY KILWORTH is an accomplished craftsman. Here he has produced a book whose solid qualities of narrative and plot make it stand out in the general outpourings of science fiction publishing. Its other major quality, and one which earmarks all of Kilworth's work, is its quiet sensitivity. There is a gentleness in this book, of preception, of description, of compassionate understanding of relationships, and people's limitations as people, that is remarkable for science fiction. Yet given this kind of accomplishment it is still a surprise that Kilworth chooses to work so entirely within the boundaries of his talent. This is not a challenging book, either to read or, I suspect to write. It is, however, an excellent read, climaxing in a sad powerful ending that unites the two interweaving stories that comprise the book.

The story concerns the son of an amateur archaeologist, transported mentally back in time. Richard Levan is the victim of an accident with the revolutionary method of visually recreating the original setting of an archaeological site, called the Wiederhaus Repeater process. Richard's mind is locked into the head of a Cro-Magnon youth some 33,000 years ago and

The megadecadent New York of the story is only a stagger away from the world of today; so is the bleakly religious Mid-West. The novel is not just an extrapolation, it's a reflection of our own times. Urban terrorism, food crimes, oppression, security systems, the slumming of our cities, bigotry — they are all with us. Angst is a twentieth century affliction.

But it is the twentieth century of Thomas M. Disch. While it is still recognisably our world, Disch forces us to look at it through his eyes, with its edges sharpened by his incisive wit.

The radio played its small repertory of tunes for the brain damaged and then delivered a guileless, Polyarctic version of the news.

All the girls, except Sandra Wolf, were cheerleaders, and all, without exception, were mindless.

Disch's description is matter-of-fact, unsurprised, almost documentary. When he talks of the system of implanting explosives in the bellies of prisoners, dissident populations, any recalcitrant individuals, he does not wring his hands in horror, or roar invective against the science and the system:

The largest achieved kill-ratio was the decimation of Palestinians living in the Gaza

Review of Split Second
by Garry Kilworth,
for Extro Magazine
Penguin Books £1.50,
191 pages 1981,
ISBN 0 14 00.5203 8

Kilworth handles the ensuing twin-levelled story with ease. The cave-boy's name is Esk and his tribe called the Gren, live on Cyprus. Into the lives of these Cro-Magnon men come a large band of Neanderthals driven south by fierce winters. They settle on Cyprus (arriving by means of a land bridge) and before long are engaged in battle with the Gren, whom they call the new-men.

Esk has his own problems. The intrusion of Richard in his life combined with the obvious favouritism he is accorded by the tribe's shaman, cause Esk to be seen as the next shaman. His half-brother, Reng has other ideas and attempts to kill him. Esk is only saved by the intervention of Richard who takes over Esk's body at the critical moment and dives from a cliff top into the sea. Esk's attackers are awed by this spectacle of the youth swimming over the surface of the deadly sea.

At the same time, in his hospital bed on modern Cyprus, a

Strip, and this was not the consequence of a human decision but of computer error.

Experience your own horror, he seems to say. The undressed facts should be enough to sicken you. He gives us much, without comment, that we accept, without comment, until we are finally forced to take notice and query everything about the society, our society. Maybe it's his intention to make us alert, but I get the impression that he isn't particularly bothered what he does to the reader . . .

Except hold our interest. In this he succeeds. The narrative itself is sparse and often becomes lost in the tangle of characters, but the narrative isn't particularly important. Disch doesn't concern himself with telling us how the flying machine works, or even with giving a satisfactory explanation of the state of mind needed for take-off. But he does give us memorable characters.

Daniel, the cantral character, is neither hero nor anti-hero. He continually allows his ambitions to be swamped by the pressures of everyday life. He adjusts to, and in a sense enjoys, his degradation as a doled up whore, for he sees, rightly, that his situation offers him no alternative. He is trapped and he is ordinary, and it is this combina-

Richard undergoes periods of consciousness, while Esk sleeps in his Pleistocene night. Richard must first deal with a disbelieving father, and later, the climactic race to help the cave-boy save his people and achieve his penultimate fulfillment.

Although the book comprises several sub-plots (I haven't described them all) Kilworth handles and interrelates them with great skill. Not once does the book falter.

Yet the book for me was mis-marketed. It should have been published as a children's book. To say that the novel would work admirably in this genre is a mark of high praise. The book's simple eloquent language, its excellent writing and descriptive prowess, and its breathless narrative pacing make it a perfect example of what is good about so much writing for children, and pathetic about so much so-called adult science fiction.

My initial doubts linger. Although the book is action-commenced and makes good read the it provides enough evidence of Mr Kilworth's larger skills that it remains faintly disappointing that he is still producing books with, so to speak, one hand tied behind his back. There is more to this writer than we've yet seen.

tion that makes him interesting.

The other main characters, despite their make-up and their deformities and their idiosyncratic posturing against the world, are just as ordinary. Mrs. Shift, for example, seems to live for her music, her dog and her castration, largely untouched by mundane matters. But, when she spots the main chance, she very quickly sells her story to the newspapers. And we discover that the larger-than-life Grandison Whiting enhances his appearance with a false beard.

That's what's gripping about the novel. The world is coming to a stop, not because of aliens or meteorite strikes, but because of the ordinary fears and prejudices of ordinary people. If there are villains in the story they are plausible, rational villains, or else they are plausible, irrational villains. And they are no more to be blamed than anyone else.

We might be able to stand heroically against the aliens, or start a brave new world after civilisation has been shattered by a storm of meteorites. But how do we protect ourselves from ourselves, and from our own social organisations?

If Disch knows, he isn't telling.

Unless he really has learned to fly.

Reviewed by Paul Campbell.

The Day of The Triffids
by John Wyndham;
Penguin 1981 pbk, 272p.
£1.25

Here it is again, in its 33rd Penguin printing, the classic "cosy catastrophe" story which still elipses down like a nice and not too hot cup of tea. In this and his other best books, Wyndham rejected the pulp-mezanine tradition of his preWar work, and like H. G. Wells tackled the SF problem from square one. Wyndham's solution is the same as Wells': the SF elements are domesticated, in-built into everyday life and made thoroughly familiar by focusing on their consequences for ordinary people. The bland "coiness" comes from the way it's made clear from the start that the narrator survives everything: from the understated view of a gigantic catastrophe; from the niceness of practically every character; but most of all from the unfleppable English storytelling — sometimes literary, sometimes witty, always fluent, calm and collected. After thirty years the whole thing has a period flavour, but still convinces . . . like Wells.

This is a TV tie-in edition, incidentally. Having successfully avoided the film (and joking) the comic strip, I'm duly not watching the BBC series: I know what a triffid looks like, thanks very much, and no special effects man is going to tell me otherwise.

reviewed by Dave Langford

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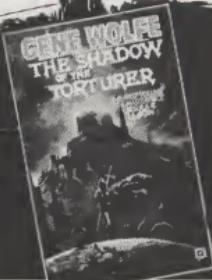
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